

written by
**Yuka
Tachibana**

illustrated by
**Yasuyuki
Syuri**

Novel

2

The Saint's
Magic Power is
Omnipotent

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Table of Contents

[Color Inserts](#)

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Act 1: The Appraisal](#)

[Behind the Scenes I](#)

[Act 2: Special Training](#)

[Act 3: Lady](#)

[Behind the Scenes II](#)

[Act 4: Herb Enhancement](#)

[Act 5: Expedition](#)

[Act 6: The Saint](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Newsletter](#)





*“Welcome to
the Royal Magi
Assembly. I shall be
your instructor in
magic. My name is
Yuri Drewes.”*

Despite being overwhelmed
by his beauty—I was frozen
in place!—I somehow
managed to introduce
myself. I’d heard my
instructor would be from
the Royal Magi Assembly,
but no one said anything
about the grand magus.

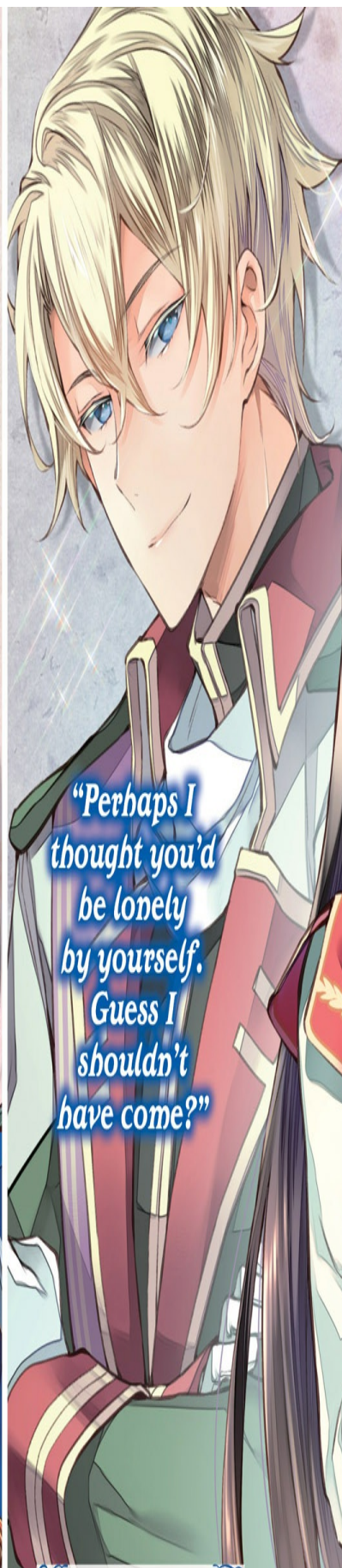
*The Saint’s
Magic Power is
Omnipotent*

"I'm worried
you're
going to do
something
to her."



Erhart Hawke

The magus (second-in-command) of the Royal Magi Assembly and Albert's older brother. A man of few words because he's a man of common sense?



"Perhaps I
thought you'd
be lonely
by yourself.
Guess I
shouldn't
have come?"

Albert Hawke

The knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order. Sei saved him from a near-fatal injury, and they've grown closer ever since.

Sei

An office lady in her twenties summoned to another world. Accidentally making scenes with her research, she is on the verge of being found out as the Saint.



"To me, his
words sounded
more like
'I would
never allow
any damage
to befall
my research
subject...'"



"But of course.
I won't allow
you to get a
single scratch-
I will protect
you."

Yuri Drewes

The grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly. He looks beautiful on the outside, but on the inside...?

Table of Contents

ACT 1 The Appraisal

Behind the Scenes I

ACT 2 Special Training

ACT 3 Lady

Behind the Scenes II

ACT 4 Herb Enhancement

ACT 5 Expedition

ACT 6 The Saint

Afterword

The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent



WRITTEN BY
Yuka Tachibana

ILLUSTRATED BY
Yasuyuki Syuri



Seven Seas Entertainment

THE SAINT'S MAGIC POWER IS OMNIPOTENT VOL. 2

© Yuka Tachibana, Yasuyuki Syuri 2017

Illustrated by Yasuyuki Syuri

First published in Japan in 2017 by
KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.
English translation rights arranged with
KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form without written permission from the copyright
holders. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places,
and incidents are the products of the author's imagination
or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events,
locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Seven Seas press and purchase enquiries can be sent to
Marketing Manager Lianne Sentar at press@gomanga.com.
Information requiring the distribution and purchase of
digital editions is available from Digital Manager CK Russell
at digital@gomanga.com.

Seven Seas and the Seven Seas logo are trademarks of
Seven Seas Entertainment. All rights reserved.

Follow Seven Seas Entertainment online at
sevenseasentertainment.com.

TRANSLATION: Julie Goniwich
COVER DESIGN: Nicky Lim
INTERIOR LAYOUT & DESIGN: Clay Gardner
PROOFREADER: Jade Gardner
LIGHT NOVEL EDITOR: E.M. Candon
PREPRESS TECHNICIAN: Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein
PRODUCTION MANAGER: Lissa Pattillo
MANAGING EDITOR: Julie Davis
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold
PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-64505-955-4

Printed in Canada

First Printing: February 2021

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Act 1:

The Appraisal

I SIGHED FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME as I gazed disconsolately out the window of the carriage making its way to the Royal Magi Assembly.

Johan Valdec, the head researcher at my institute, chuckled. “You don’t look too happy about this. Though I can’t say I don’t understand how you must be feeling.”

“Yeah...” I responded with my own chuckle. Johan shrugged apologetically.

My attention drifted back outside the carriage as I reflected upon the events of the day prior.

Just as we were wrapping up for the day, a message arrived from the Royal Magi Assembly. They wanted me to visit them so they could perform the Appraisal tomorrow—you know, the day that was now *today*.

Appraise what, you ask? Me.

After the mass magical healing I cast the other day at the hospital, every person in every corner of the Kingdom of Salutania was now calling me the Saint. Meanwhile, about a week ago, the grand magus, who had fallen into a coma after the Saint Summoning Ritual, finally woke up.

This grand magus was the only person in the whole kingdom who could Appraise human beings. His lengthy coma had thus far protected me from being subjected to the process. Though he had yet to fully recover, the kingdom considered confirming the Saint’s identity of highest priority, so he would push through to get it done.

Considering the events at the hospital, I couldn’t be surprised it had come to this. Of course people had started rumors I was the Saint after I used such powerful healing magic.

So, I had prepared myself for what was to come...but I was still agitated. From what I understood, Appraisal verified a person’s Stats, which meant there

would be no hiding it anymore—my Stats clearly indicated I was the Saint.

“Are you really so upset about this?”

I must have made a bitter expression because when I turned, I found Johan frowning worriedly.

“Mm. I’d say I’m feeling pretty depressed.”

“I know you don’t want to hear it, but that’s what you get for going on a rampage like that.”

“‘Rampage’? That’s slander if I ever heard it. All I did was cure them a little bit,” I pouted.

“You call that ‘a little bit’?” Johan said, exasperated.

We exchanged a humorless chuckle. Johan had taken good care of me ever since I had moved into my room on the third floor of the research institute. He usually tried to shrug off even serious topics as no big deal so I wouldn’t fret, but once in a while, the matter was too obvious to defer.

He probably only tended my feelings because I worked for him, but I was grateful. Our spot of banter *did* cheer me up a little.

“Even so, I doubt they’ll act right away even after you’ve been Appraised,” he said slowly, suddenly wearing a grave expression.

The change had been gradual at first, but the palace was now certain that the number of monsters had decreased since the summoning ritual, meaning the Saint had definitely been summoned. However, the monsters had only decreased in the vicinity of the capital. They were still far too common once you ranged farther afield.

In the distant past, the Saints had accompanied the Knightly Orders to any territory suffering from a monster invasion. There, she used powers only she could wield to wipe out the monsters and purify the land. The kingdom hoped to do the same now.

“Does eliminating monsters...mean having to fight them?” I asked.

“It does. However, mages cast spells at range while protected by knights, so optimally, you wouldn’t be in as much danger.”

“But what if the monsters used magic, too? They’d be able to hit us then, right?”

“True enough. I can’t say you’d be completely safe.”

“I’ve never seen real battle. Neither has Aira.”

Sure, globally speaking, some places in my old world were embroiled in war. However, for as long as I’d been alive, Japan had always been at peace. Neither I nor Aira, the girl who had been summoned with me, had ever been in life-threatening situations—I assumed. I doubted either of us would be especially useful getting dragged along on one of the knights’ expeditions.

Although, I suppose I do have a ton of experience slaying monsters in games.

“Well, I expect she’s done some kind of training by now,” said Johan. “That girl who was summoned with you—Aira, was it? This is just the sort of thing she’s been studying at the Academy.”

“Really?”

“The students go to the eastern forest to slay monsters, after all. I’m sure she’s been as well.”

I was a bit dismayed to be reminded of this. I couldn’t help worrying about whether she’d be okay, though I also recalled one of the Knightly Orders had been assigned to guard her—along with the crown prince and the crown prince’s entourage—on just such an excursion. I hadn’t heard about Aira being injured or anything, so she was probably fine, I hoped. They’d gone to the eastern forest, hadn’t they? I understood that was largely populated by weaker monsters.

A thought popped into my head. “What if...today’s Appraisal *doesn’t* indicate I’m the Saint?”

Johan’s eyes widened a little, but he smiled and chuckled. “Then the work of the Saint would fall to Aira. But...”

“But what?”

“You’ll probably be asked to provide support.”

“Support how?”

“They’d primarily want you to employ your Healing Magic.”

That made sense. I had shocked a whole ton of people when I healed every single one of the injured members of the Second and Third Orders without breaking a sweat. I could very well picture them asking for round two of that treatment.

“If they request my assistance, am I going to have to transfer to the Royal Magi Assembly?” I asked.

“I’m not sure.”

“I’d rather not...if possible.”

The research institute was my favorite workplace *ever*. I didn’t mind saying “yes” to the odd request for support on the battlefield, but I kinda wasn’t looking for a career shift. When I told Johan as much, he promised he would handle it.

As we debated what was to come, we arrived at the barracks of the Royal Magi Assembly. One of their mages came out to greet us, and we followed him through the barracks.

Wherever we went, the other mages sneaked furtive glances at us. People had started doing the same at the royal palace, too. I was used to it, to an extent, but it still bothered me. Not that feeling bothered could change the situation.

“Head Researcher Valdec of the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora and Lady Sei are here to see you,” the mage announced as he knocked on the door to the grand magus’s office.

We were promptly told to enter, so the mage ushered us in. Inside, we found Lord Smarty-Glasses and a young man with navy-blue hair whose facial features were so perfectly beautiful that you’d think he’d been artificially crafted.

What in the world? How can there be so many gorgeous men assembled in one room like this?! I seriously feel out of place here!

Our mage guide left as soon as he saw us in, which left us at four: Johan, Lord Smarty-Glasses, the young man, and me.

“Welcome to the Royal Magi Assembly. I am Grand Magus Yuri Drewes.” The young man smiled sweetly as he introduced himself.



“My name is Sei.” Despite being overwhelmed by his beauty—I was frozen in place!—I somehow managed to introduce myself.

This was the grand magus? He looked even younger than Lord Smarty-Glasses, who stood right next to him. Or maybe Lord Smarty-Glasses came off as older because he was so handsome and put together.

Actually, this Yuri might be about the same age as Jude. It was probably impolite to guess, so I did my best not to show my surprise.

In any case, we were invited to sit on a couch. As we did so, Yuri also introduced Lord Smarty-Glasses, though he seemed to add it as an afterthought. “Oh, and this is Magus Erhart Hawke. I believe you two are already acquainted.”

“Uh, yes.”

Oh nooo. We had never formally introduced ourselves to one other, so I hadn’t had any idea who he was. Given the way the other mages got all stiff and flinchy around him sometimes, I had assumed he was high-ranking, but I hadn’t realized he was their *magus*, i.e., their second-in-command. I could totally see it, too.

However, it was his last name that really gave me pause. “Hawke”—did that mean...

Johan, who was sitting next to me, must have picked up on my surprise, because he whispered, “That’s Al’s older brother.”

Introductions out of the way, Yuri immediately jumped to the main reason for our meeting. “Now then, as I believe you are already aware, I wish to Appraise you.”

“So I heard.”

It was time.

Yuri began with an explanation of the magic, which proved similar to the one Jude had once given me. Appraisal Magic could be used on people, but without the subject’s consent, it got repelled. Furthermore, if the appraisee’s base level exceeded the Appraiser’s, it simply wouldn’t work.

“So, please, just relax,” Yuri said with a smile.

I'll do my best... I nodded.

“Appraise.”

I wasn't an entirely willing subject, but more than anything, I hoped the spell wouldn't just bounce off. The implications of that... At any rate, I obediently let him cast it on me.

For a moment, an indescribable sensation washed over me—followed by the sensation of something...glancing away? The strange discomfort vanished more or less immediately.

Huh? Wait, did it work?

I blinked in surprise. Everyone, including the grand magus, looked shocked as well. Then Johan sent me a suspicious glance.

Wait, wait, I've been falsely accused! I swear I cooperated!

“Sei,” Johan scolded.

I was positive I hadn't fought the spell, so I shot him an annoyed look.

At this, Yuri smoothed over his own startlement with a smile. “I take it that means you didn't refuse the Appraisal on purpose?”

“Of course not!”

Yuri touched his chin and looked down, only looking back up after a moment of thought. “In that case, I can only conclude that your base level exceeds mine.”

“I see.”

“Would you care to share that level?”

He had figured me out. This had to be the problem, since it was the only other reason Appraisal could fail. And, well, I was nearly sure my base level surpassed his. You see, the knights of the Third Order were all lower than me, and the majority were in the thirties. I had long since realized that meant people of higher ranks in the knightly and magical orders had to be Level 40-something, or thereabouts.

But since my base level was Level 55, even someone at Level 49 would be six levels lower than me.

He wants the truth, huh? Hm... Jude and the knights were all so casual when I asked for theirs. I guess it shouldn't be too big a deal to share mine.

"Fifty-five," I answered honestly.

All three of them made a different face: Yuri's smile froze. Lord Smarty-Glasses' eyes opened wide. Johan gaped.

That's quite the once-in-a-lifetime expression for you, Johan.

"Fifty-five...you say..." Yuri was the first to regain his composure, and he murmured as if trying to register what I had said.

I confirmed aloud. For some reason, he started laughing.

"Level 55 would indeed fend off my Appraisal, yes."

"Your base level's *how* high?" Johan stared at me, still shocked.

Please, don't look at me like that. I've been the same level this whole time!

"I see. That is quite perplexing." Yuri didn't look especially perplexed to me, though. When I tilted my head in question, Yuri furrowed his brow in a *somewhat* perplexed manner. "If we can't Appraise you, then I suppose we must resort to the traditional method."

"Traditional method?"

"Indeed."

Upon hearing this, Lord Smarty-Glasses smoothly rose from his seat, went to gather a pen and paper from the grand magus's desk, and placed them in front of me. Yuri explained himself as I frowned at these two thoroughly mundane objects: If no mage was available to Appraise someone, it was up to the person in question to report their Stats themselves.

The grand magus simply didn't have the time to check every single person's Stats, so the majority of the populace reported their abilities using this method.

For example, everyone who worked at the palace self-reported their Stats prior to employment. However, a person's skills and level partially determined

their career path and potential for promotion, which tempted some to exaggerate their numbers. As such, palace employees were subjected to random tests to see if they could back up their claims. Previously, these tests had required the individual to use magic appropriate to the level they reported themselves to be. Now, however, if the need arose, the current grand magus could wander over and Appraise someone himself.

“Will you be able to see my Stats if I cast the test spell?” I asked out of curiosity.

“No. Stats are naturally confidential, and we treat them as such.”

It sounded a bit like how personal information was treated in Japan. Nevertheless, despite Yuri’s assurances, given how offhandedly Jude and the knights had told me their levels, it didn’t seem like most people were inclined to keep this information all that big of a secret. Since useful skills could lead to quick promotions, a number of people thought it beneficial to freely share theirs.

“I see.” I looked back down at the paper. *Hmm, what to do? Maybe I should just write it down...*

I stared unmoving at the paper. I was so still that the other three didn’t say a word. The room sank into silence.

On the way to the Assembly, Johan and I had talked a lot about the future, but I still felt uncertain. If I wrote my true Stats now, I would be compelled to take up the mantle of the Saint.

So...what if I lied? Slight problem there. Although I had asked Jude and everyone about their levels and such, I didn’t really know what average Salutanian Stats looked like. And if I didn’t concoct a convincing lie, it would be as good as not lying at all.

“Are you unwilling?” Yuri asked while I mulled. I frowned up at him, and he smiled kindly at me. “You don’t have to report anything you don’t want to.”

At those words, Lord Smarty-Glasses eyes widened again. I looked to my side to find Johan with the same expression.

“Really?” I asked.

“I don’t mind.”

“Grand Magus.” Lord Smarty-Glasses sounded flustered, but Yuri didn’t take back his words.

Rather, he laughed again. “Listen, if you don’t want to do it, how can we believe anything you write? No, this won’t do.”

Be that as it may, were they really okay with no report at all? Lord Smarty-Glasses and Johan didn’t seem to be.

I know they have ways to assess my Magic skills in a roundabout fashion, but are they not going to do that either? I didn’t ask that out loud, but I peered at Yuri dubiously.

His smile deepened, just slightly. “Instead, I ask only that you cast a spell or two.”

Ah, so that *was* his plan. But seeing as so many people had already witnessed me casting unusual magic at the hospital, I couldn’t really protest against casting the same thing in front of them—that skill was already on the record.

I nodded, and Yuri explained what he wanted me to do. I was to cast Heal, which I had used numerous times during that whole “rampage,” as Johan called it. I pointed out that no one here was injured—I hoped—but Yuri assured me the spell could be used on healthy people, too.

Was that really all he was after, though? Heal was the most basic of Holy Magic spells. Although, I suppose its power increased depending on an individual’s Holy Magic level. Additionally, when cast on healthy people, it was difficult, if not impossible, to quantitatively describe its effect, so I couldn’t see how this was going to help them determine my Stats.

“Just what is this going to tell you?” I asked curiously.

“There’s just something I’d like to confirm.”

Yuri explained that he wanted to see if magic cast by those summoned from another world was *qualitatively* different from magic cast by people of this world.

Hey, wait a minute... Was it? I had seen Jude cast magic before, but Water

Magic and Holy Magic just looked too different for me to make any assumptions. Unfortunately, I had never seen anyone else use Holy Magic. Oof. I wanted to ask for a visual demonstration from a native, but that would make it sound like I expected there to be a damning difference. After all, I had been reluctant to report my Stats. They had ample reason to suspect my true nature—they just lacked confirmation.

I thought it over, but I couldn't come up with a deflection.

At worst, if there is a remarkable difference, I can just hand-wave it by speculating that it's, you know, like he says—I'm from another world! Guess my magic's weird! Or, you know, it's just odd because my base level is high, right? Right.

Okay. I could do this.

I concentrated on casting Heal. Yuri didn't direct me to cast it on any specific person, so I just cast it on myself. The spell covered my whole body in a faint but bright white mist. Gold sparkles twinkled through the white, just like always, looking very pretty.

"Oh, my," I heard someone say under their breath and found Lord Smarty-Glasses with his eyes once again stuck in big ol' deer-in-headlights position.

Hoo boy. Maybe there *was* something different about my power.

I glanced at the other two to find Yuri's eyes positively sparkling, while Johan actually looked calmer and more like himself than he had since I revealed my base level.

Yuri and Lord Smarty-Glasses, though... They didn't seem calm at all.

"Is... Is there something weird, then?" I asked.

"Indeed." Yuri nodded excitedly. "Take a look at this."

And then Yuri cast Heal on himself, too, and his body glowed white.

"Do you see?" he asked after the light faded.

But, well, I couldn't. I shook my head, and he cast it again. His body once more glowed white—and that's when I figured it out. To double-check, I also cast Heal on myself. Just like Yuri, I glowed white, but my spell produced those

tell-tale gold sparkles.

“Do you see it now?” he asked.

“I do...”

At last, Yuri revealed that he had heard from the knights of the Second and Third Orders that my Heal spell had seemed somewhat odd to them. When other mages cast the spell, they produced a white light like I had just seen on Yuri—sparkles, though, those were weird.

Sometimes, granted, Elemental Magic could (literally) color a spell. White light indicated Holy Magic; other elements emitted different colors. Normally, though, you needed to train in order to perceive this effect.

Yuri said he wasn’t sure if my gold sparkles were an effect of my alien origin or if there was another cause.

It occurred to me then that I didn’t think anyone had checked Aira’s Stats yet, either. When I asked, they confirmed they hadn’t. I wondered if they would tell me how her Stats came out... But since they were confidential, that was probably a pipe dream.

However, Yuri did promise that if he discovered the cause for my sparkles, he would tell me right way—seeing as it directly concerned me.

In the end, we didn’t confirm whether I was the Saint, but we did now know my magic was different from that of anyone else in the kingdom.

So many crazy things had happened since my summoning. At least I now had a feeling I knew the cause of my fifty-percent-bonus curse—it mostly arose when I used magic, after all. Good grief.

Two days after my Appraisal at the Royal Magi Assembly, a messenger came from the palace. Messengers from the palace were a regular thing, but this time it was a much more formal affair than usual, so much so that Johan received them at the entrance to the research institute. He even asked me to join him in welcoming them.

After a terribly stuffy exchange between Johan and the messenger, we all

went to his office.

The messenger was being all stiff because he had brought a letter addressed to me from His Majesty, the king. The contents of the letter were as follows: He wanted me to meet him the following day at the palace.

Uhh, so this is an audience with the king?

“Johan...” I said.

“Yeah?”

“I don’t really have anything suitable to wear.”

Upon reading the letter, I couldn’t help thinking of the first time I had met the king. He’d said something about wanting to issue a formal apology. Was that what this was about? But I was pretty sure I had told him I didn’t need—or want!—an apology on such a grand, official scale. Maybe he hadn’t listened.

Also, while Liz had taught me some basic manners for conducting myself here in the kingdom, we hadn’t covered anything on the level of an *audience* with the *king*.

Therefore: I tried, oh how I tried, to refuse the meeting on the basis of improper attire...but that didn’t work.

“You needn’t prepare a thing, Lady Sei,” said the messenger. “We have all you might require ready for you in the palace.”

Welp, there went my chance for escape. I had to confess I really had no idea what I was doing, but the messenger assured me manners wouldn’t be a problem and kept politely encouraging me and/or insisting that I should go. Although I felt a bit uneasy about the messenger’s unerringly polite demeanor, I realized it might be problematic if I resisted any further and gave in to the invitation.

Maybe I should have pushed harder, but I had a feeling that would just cause more trouble in the end.

The day I met His Majesty in the library, he had tried to offer me all kinds of things, like land and a title. If I were to deny him yet again, he might think I was still mad about my initial treatment—and maybe I was, kind of—and then he

might forcibly grant me land and a title as some kind of desperate apology. It would leave me in an incredibly awkward position, since I definitely wouldn't know what to do with *that*.

Also, part of me worried I might get Johan in trouble if I put my foot down. From the point of view of the research institute, the king was their boss's boss's boss, *etc.* Though I was in another world and was considered a bit eccentric, Johan could catch blame for not corralling me, as he was born here and had to know better.

Even if no one got on his case explicitly, it had to be difficult for him being stuck between me and the palace all the time. Middle management sure has it rough. Johan had done so much for me, so I didn't want to stress him out or make trouble.

Though, I bet if I ever expressed this concern to him, he'd just tell me not to worry.

The following day, I left for the palace early in the morning to ready myself for the audience.

It seemed the process of getting ready to meet the king was an involved one, to say the least. When I wondered aloud if it was truly necessary to start preparing at the crack of dawn, the messenger snorted as if I were crazy.

The palace had prepared large chambers for my arrival; it resembled a hotel suite in that it had several rooms, including a bedroom and living room. The maids waiting there swarmed me the moment I entered. They whisked me to the bathroom, had me stripped in the blink of an eye, and propelled me into a piping hot bath.

I washed every day at the institute, so I thought it kind of unnecessary to do so *again*, but they wouldn't budge. They scrubbed me from head to toe, even my fingertips. I was overwhelmed, but I had endured this before, back when I lived in the palace for a time right after my summoning.

It was a little scary to think I might become used to this kind of thing.

The maids attending me that morning were the ones who had taken care of

me in my first days at the palace, which did help me reckon with this second round of embarrassing intimacy.

After I got out of the tub, the maids thoroughly massaged my whole body. They used a combination of geranium and bergamot essential oils, so the room filled with a lovely perfume. The maids were quite skilled masseuses, so it felt fantastic. Considering I'd woken up before sunrise, I couldn't help but doze off.

After the massage, I sat in a daze as the maids swiftly applied my makeup. Then someone said my name, snapping me back to reality. When I looked in the mirror, I found myself so polished that I didn't recognize the lady staring back at me. They had left my hair down as usual, but even that had been treated with scented oil and attentively combed, which left it luminous. The maids seemed quite satisfied with their work.

Now that my body was ready, all that remained was to get dressed. The maids held up not a dress, like I had imagined, but a robe made of lustrous white cloth with elegant golden embroidery. The choice surprised me, since up until that point, it had seemed they were trying to doll me up like some kind of noble lady. I had really thought they would stuff me into one of those dresses with the hardcore waist corset.

This robe resembled what the mages of the Royal Magi Assembly wore, but far lovelier. I couldn't help but think it looked...saintly. My cheek twitched reflexively at the thought.

I couldn't remember doing anything that particularly Saint-ish on the day of my Appraisal. However, while I hadn't exactly confirmed anything, I had acted rather suspiciously. In the end, I failed to write down my Stats, which probably just made me look guilty. And that was that. Between my behavior and everything else, they likely felt justified in going ahead and treating me as the Saint.

As I thought all this over, the maids went about clothing me. When they were done, I took another look in the mirror, only to find the Saint standing where Sei should've been.

Yeah. What could I say? Even I was surprised. I looked so pure and Saintly that I almost expected a halo to pop into existence over my head. It was like some

kind of joke.

“You look beautiful,” the head maid praised me.

“Thank you,” I said honestly. If I looked impressive, it was entirely thanks to their skills.

My own hard work had improved the condition of my skin since my arrival, but I looked as pretty as I did now because people whose *jobs* it was to beautify people had worked their magic on me. Honestly, seeing my skin glow even brighter than usual pleased me and left me a little excited, too.

Just as I was admiring my reflection, I heard someone announce I had a visitor. I didn’t mind, since I was decked out in such a way that I couldn’t possibly be embarrassed, and told them to let the visitor into the living room.

I took one last look at myself in the bedroom mirror before heading out to meet my guest.

“Lord Hawke?” I found Knight Commander Albert Hawke waiting for me on the couch. I blinked at him in surprise. *Huh? Why is he here?*

He stood and turned toward me. “Good morning, Sei.”

“Good morning. Um, did something happen?”

I asked it in such a weird way that Albert cocked his head in confusion before finally grasping what I was trying to ask. At that, he explained that he was here to be my bodyguard on the way to my meeting with the king.

My bodyguard?! Wait, we’re in the palace, aren’t we? Why would I need a bodyguard?

He chuckled awkwardly at my surprise. “Perhaps I thought you’d be lonely by yourself. Guess I shouldn’t have come?”

“Huh? Oh! No, I don’t mind at all!” I shook my head.

“Good.” He looked relieved.

“Um, thank you.”

Apparently, even the people native to Salutania got nervous before their first audience with the king. Albert had come especially because he understood it

helped to have someone you knew beside you at times like these. He had heard about my audience from Johan, who was also worried.

My heart warmed at their kindness.

Thank you, both of you. As I thought that, I noticed Albert staring at me. “What is it?” I asked.

“Oh, uh... Just, you look different than usual, but very pretty as always.” He was momentarily at a loss for words, then smiled softly.

On my end, it was like he’d dropped a bombshell on me. Although I had grown a bit used to Johan’s attacks, Albert’s were still super-effective. The days he said such things, with that glow on his cheeks and slightly husky voice, I always! I just! Aaahhh...

My face flushed instantly. I was sure steam was coming off my cheeks. I really wasn’t used to this kind of compliment, okay?!

I held back the urge to screech and stared down at my feet in an effort to hide my face. Plus, I couldn’t bring myself to look him in the eye just yet.

“Sei,” Albert took a step toward me, closing the distance between us.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him raise his hand. I squeezed my eyes shut just as he was about to touch my cheek.



“I-It’s because the maids are so good at their jobs...” I trailed off and then remembered the maids were actually with us.

W-was I acting weird in front of other people?! My eyes darted about to find the maids glancing our way as they waited by the walls for further requests.

When my eyes met theirs, they quietly looked away.

They definitely saw... Oh my God, I just want to crawl into a hole right now. I cradled my head, filled with the urge to crouch down on the spot, but then there was a knock at the door.

The indescribable mood in the room dissipated, and one of the maids moved to answer the door. As Albert lowered his hand, I trembled with a mix of relief and disappointment.

The official who knocked had come to tell us the king was ready to receive me.

The maids saw us out as we followed the official to the throne room. It seemed to be some distance, and we walked in silence down a series of long, long halls. If I had been alone, I probably would’ve lost my mind around then. Thankfully, since Albert was right behind me, I remained relatively calm.

When we arrived at the doors to the throne room, the official explained what would happen once I stepped inside. Thank goodness he covered it again—I feared I was about to be tossed into the deep end. At last, I took a deep breath, and the guards posted outside opened the doors.

To my surprise, the throne room was far smaller than I had imagined. I had expected something huge and spacious, not this relatively confined space that contained a dozen or so people (whom I could only assume were nobles). In the back, at the center, the throne loomed, with His Majesty the king seated upon it. The man standing next to him had to be the prime minister. He was middle-aged, with smoothed-back navy-blue hair and a stern expression.

Albert stepped out from behind me and moved to join the nobles. Our eyes met for the briefest of moments. A twinkle in his eye told me I would be okay.

And so, I followed the official’s instructions and walked to the center of the

room. When I came to a stop, I heard the doors close behind me. I didn't have a script for what was supposed to happen next. The official had told me to come here and nothing else. I felt nervous, and the atmosphere was strange and tense.

After a few moments, the king stood from his throne, making the atmosphere tense even further. He proceeded down from the dais the throne sat upon and made his way to me, stopping only a few steps away.

"I am Siegfried Salutania, the ruler of this kingdom."

"My name is Sei Takanashi." I gave my name back; I didn't know if that was the appropriate next step, but it seemed right.

"First, I must apologize for summoning you to my kingdom without warning, as well as for my son's uncouth behavior." He bowed deeply to me.

Everyone around us followed suit: they bowed simultaneously to me.

Whoa, hold on a minute. How am I supposed to handle this?! I was mentally drenched in a cold sweat, but everyone remained completely still as they followed the king's lead.

Putting the question of forgiveness aside, I should probably have him raise his head, right?

"Please rise," I managed to stop my voice from quivering as I made the request.

All at once, everyone stood straight again. The tension in the air seemed to relax just a touch.

I knew the king wanted to make me a formal apology, but this was just way too much for a commoner like me to handle. *Hoo boy, I'd really appreciate if we never did this ever again.*

I hoped we were done, but I wasn't so lucky.

"Lady Sei, since your arrival, you have performed numerous meritorious deeds for my people. In addition to my apology, I am compelled to reward you. What do you desire? Say it, and it is yours."

"A reward?" I had no idea off the top of my head, especially since I had been

banking on the apology being the end of these shenanigans.

A reward, a reward... Come on, Sei, he asked you this before, didn't he? But there wasn't anything in particular I needed! Would it be okay to say I don't want one again?

I glanced Albert's way to find his brow furrowed. It wasn't just him, either, but the other nobles, too. They watched with bated breath to see how this played out.

"It could be rank in court, land, anything, as long as it is in our power. Simply name your wish," the prime-minister guy suggested, since I had been silent for so long.

I really didn't know how to respond, and worse, I realized the mood was getting all tense again. Both the (probably) prime minister and the king wore stern looks.

Maybe it's common to dole out titles and land and stuff, but I don't want any of that! There's no way I'd be able to handle either, and I'm afraid they'd limit my freedoms, too. Not to mention, possessing either of those would make it difficult to leave this country if I ever needed to. Although, I guess I could just accept them and then give it all up if I really wanted to leave.

"Um, I'm not..."

As my thoughts swirled, I started mumbling a vague refusal, but that only made the prime minister frown all the more. What would happen if I once again insisted I didn't want anything? I had the impulse to say just that, if only to see what they'd do, but I had a feeling that was kind of inappropriate, given how agitated everyone looked.

Based on the king's own words, the point of this audience was his apology. Perhaps they meant to use my acceptance (or not) of this reward to gauge my true feelings.

In truth, while I had been pretty ticked off when I was first summoned, over half a year had passed since then, and that anger had simmered down quite a bit. I liked my life at the research institute, and I'd stopped being so worked up about things since devoting myself to my research.

Being angry required a cosmic crap-ton of energy, after all, so it was hard to stay upset for long. Rather than waste my energy on ill feeling, I preferred using it to gain a firm foothold on my new life. In fact, the researchers, the knights, everyone I had met...they were all good people. Maybe part of me was already bound to them.

At first, I had wanted to leave Salutania as soon as possible, but now, I didn't think I did. Actually, I only wanted to be prepared to leave as an emergency backup plan. Despite that, I didn't really have any strong feelings about fleeing anymore, even with the king insisting on this vaguely mortifying apology.

Hmm. I want to say "thanks, but no thanks," but I worry it'd just put us back at square one, and we'd do this song and dance all over again. And that would be problematic. It'd be better to think of some kind of reward and end it here. I'd rather it be something that wouldn't be too troublesome, but what?

Suddenly, an idea came to mind. "You said I could ask for anything, right?"

"Of course."

"In that case, may I have permission to enter the Forbidden Depository?"

The king looked slightly taken aback. However, the fact of the matter was that this request wouldn't cause me more problems later, and more importantly, I did actually want it a whole lot.

I had been hoping to make a kind of potion even more potent than high-grade potions, but I had been stuck for a long time. I had finished reading practically every book related to herbology in the royal library, and all I could think to do next was check out the books in the Forbidden Depository. However, I had half-given up on the idea, since only a few of the researchers had permission to go in there.

Therefore, I asked for this permission as my reward. I had no other options.

"Also, I would like to study magic, so could you assign me an instructor?"

Asking for one more thing had to tie a bow on this—it just had to.

And, after all, thanks to my Magic skills, I could use magic, too. However, everything I knew was self-taught from books in the library, so I suspected I still

had a lot to learn. The world I came from didn't have magic, so I wanted a chance to properly learn from a teacher. Not to mention, being able to use magic in this world would lend itself well to my future independence.

“Very well. I shall have these prepared for you.”

With that, my wishes were granted. However, they seemed unexpected. The palace said it would take some time to coordinate things, so once my rewards were ready, I would be notified.

Behind the Scenes I

THERE WAS A KNOCK at the door to the king's office. The chamberlain politely announced to the master of the room that he had a visitor: "Grand Magus Drewes is here to see you, Your Majesty."

"Let him in."

At the king's words, the chamberlain bowed respectfully and headed back toward the door.

A few moments later, a young man of exquisite beauty entered the room wearing a smile. He bowed respectfully to the master of the room as well. "I am here to make my report."

"I see."

The king suspected the nature of the forthcoming report and so ordered everyone else to clear the room. The only people remaining were the king, the prime minister, and Grand Magus Yuri Drewes.

"Is this report in regards to the Saint?" the prime minister asked.

Yuri nodded. "That is correct."

With that, he described the results of his efforts to Appraise both potential Saints. Upon hearing them, the king and prime minister groaned and fell silent.

Yuri had Appraised Aira without any problems, and he had submitted a report on her Stats based on the Appraisal. The problem was the other potential Saint, Sei. She had repelled Yuri's spell, and he therefore was unable to confirm her Stats.

This came as a shock. Yuri famously possessed the highest base level in the kingdom; he was known to all Salutania for his skill with magic. Everyone had blithely assumed that he would, of course, be able to Appraise Sei—unless she purposefully repelled him.

"Are you saying the repulsion was unintentional? That her base level exceeds

yours?”

“It seems so.”

“What *is* her level, then?”

“She claims to be Level 55.”

“Fifty-five...”

That would make her base level ten higher than Yuri’s. If that were the case, there was simply no way for Yuri to Appraise her.

“So, we still do not know which of the two women is the Saint,” the prime minister muttered with a grim look.

Although there were multiple theories on how to identify the Saint, there was no certain method. All history had to say on the matter was that the Saint possessed some kind of power that could eliminate monsters. However, the kingdom presently had no idea what that actually meant. They had hoped to discern some of the truth by Appraising both women.

Unfortunately, their hopes came to naught, as they couldn’t accurately discern Sei’s Stats. All they could rely on at the moment were Sei’s incredibly high base level and the unusual rapidity of Aira’s base and skill level growth. As each woman possessed different special qualities, there was no way to determine which was the true Saint.

However, as the prime minister bemoaned this fact, Yuri tsked. “That’s not true.”

The king and prime minister looked at Yuri with surprise. Yuri smiled silently at their frowns.

“So, which of them is it?” the king asked.

Yuri inhaled lightly. “Most likely Lady Sei.”

The king gasped and then took a deeper breath. “You’re certain of this?”

“It is only my speculation, but in all probability, yes.” Yuri’s even smile remained unchanged.

“I see.”

“Why do you believe this?” the prime minister asked.

Yuri explained himself with smooth surety: It all began with the moment Sei used Holy Magic at the hospital. The knights she healed reported her spell appeared unusual. Consequently, Yuri observed both Sei and Aira using Holy Magic. At first, Yuri wondered whether the gold sparkles in Sei’s magic might be a trait particular to those summoned from another world. However, when Aira cast the same spell that Sei did, hers only glowed white. It looked exactly like how it would if Yuri had cast it himself—or indeed, anyone from their world.

Therefore, Yuri concluded that Sei’s gold phenomena was not the result of her otherworldly origin but rather that it was an indicator of her Sainthood.

“This gold sheen is mostly likely a trait of the Saint’s power. Furthermore, when it comes to magic, Lady Sei’s abilities are far more potent than any ordinary person’s, even Aira’s.”

“I see.” The king nodded and sunk into thought as he frowned at his desk. “Thank you for the report. You may go.”

“Thank you. I shall take my leave.”

After confirming Yuri had left the room, the prime minister frowned. “Well, this makes matters a bit more complicated.”

“Indeed. Are things the same as before on *his* end?”

“If you mean your son, then yes.”

The king sighed deeply. They were speaking of the crown prince.

The crown prince, who had overseen the Saint Summoning Ritual, had acted as Aira’s guardian ever since she was brought to their world. He vigorously dedicated himself to the role, but his brazen self-assuredness had lately resulted in no small amount of discord.

News of these troubles had reached the ears of the king, leaving him stymied. He had given his son advice on the matter more than once. However, the crown prince showed no sign of changing his behavior. There had even been talk of forcibly separating Aira and the crown prince, but it wasn’t so easy to take the heir to the throne to task.

If the king could have assigned his son to a more pressing matter, he would have used it as an excuse to separate them, but unfortunately, the matter of the Saint superseded all others.

Under the current circumstances, tearing the two apart for anything less than an emergency would damage the crown prince's standing to the point that the second prince would likely be nominated to the throne. That could end up causing a succession crisis, which Salutania had until now avoided. This very concern had left the higher-ups of the kingdom in a deadlock over how to address the crown prince's imprudence.

Only exacerbating the issue was the fact that, on the day of the ritual, the prince had for some reason completely ignored Sei and left her behind. As a result, he offended Sei, leading to a great deal of anxiety for everyone who had to deal with her at that moment and ever since.

Worse, according to Grand Magus Drewes' report, it was now more or less clear that Sei was the Saint. It would be pure catastrophe if she took her anger out on the kingdom itself, and the prince would be viewed with even more disdain for causing it.

"I suppose it's about time to prepare myself for what's to come," the king said slowly to himself.

The prime minister only watched him in silence.

Up until this moment, they had left aside the question of Sei's Sainthood and simply treated her as a valuable asset to the kingdom. Even with her unconfirmed but vital status, many had brought up the need to reward her for her contributions thus far—and to apologize for the crown prince's behavior. Now, the need could not be denied.

"We must offer her a formal apology. How go the preparations?" the king asked.

"Nearly ready, but given what's come to light today, we will need to make a few adjustments."

"It's been some time since her summoning. Finish as soon as possible."

"As you command, Your Majesty." The prime minister bowed respectfully.

After a moment of silence, the king spoke again. “From now on, we will need to treat Sei as the Saint, but it seems to me it would be best to remain... understated.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. When I had the chance to speak with her, she seemed to dislike being made the center of attention or anything that might lead to that. I offered her things nobles generally desire, but she turned them all down.”

“That...makes things difficult, doesn’t it? It would be in our best interests to, if possible, grant her a title or land to ensure she stays in our kingdom.”

“Yes, and those specifically were what she rejected. From what I’ve heard, she is incredibly well educated. She might even have guessed my intentions when I offered them.” The king chuckled while the prime minister touched his forehead as if in pain and shook his head.

From there, they began to discuss the particulars of the king’s formal apology, such as the scale of the event and who would attend. Before long, they also planned how to henceforth conduct themselves with Sei.

They took Sei’s desires into consideration and weighed them against the expectations of king and court. Eventually, they decided the room for audiences with envoys from abroad wouldn’t do; they would use a much smaller throne room instead. The attendees would include only the king and the prime minister, as well as each minister, the knight commanders of the Orders of the Knights, and those of especially high rank in court. That would have to do.

“I’m back,” Yuri said as he entered his office at the Royal Magi Assembly.

Beside his desk was another one, at which sat Magus Erhart. Erhart, you see, managed most of the work Yuri was supposed to do.

Yuri’s talent had been discovered by the previous grand magus, who later adopted him. Thanks to the previous grand magus’s dedicated instruction and Yuri’s own innate talent, Yuri had grown up to be a prominent researcher of magic. Whenever theoretical discussions arose, Yuri inevitably looked as though he were thinking of something else, something deeper.

After graduating from the academy, Yuri had been assigned to the Royal Magi Assembly, where he gleefully devoted himself to his studies. His ceaseless research had led to his high base level; he needed to keep leveling up in order to increase his Magic skills and proceed with his investigations.

He never balked at the thought of running out on his own monster-slaying expeditions to deepen his knowledge, either. For this, he had earned nicknames like “Bloodthirsty,” which wasn’t really the sort of thing you’d associate with a mage. Before Yuri knew it, he was such an expert that no one else in the Royal Magi Assembly could match him.

The prestige of being elevated to grand magus was actually a collar to keep him bound to the palace. However, as grand magus, Yuri was allowed to indulge in whatever scholarly pursuits he desired—the only reason he had agreed to take up the title.

However, while he continued to devote himself to the advancement of metaphysical theory, he did as little desk work as he could get away with. He was especially unconcerned with matters that didn’t attract his interest. As such, he had recruited Erhart to be his assistant.

“I made my report,” Yuri said.

“They didn’t press you about her Stats?”

“Not particularly. I did report the base level she told me, though.”

“I see.”

“I think they’ll be more preoccupied with the fact that I also told them I think Sei is the Saint.”

Yuri wore an innocent smile quite unlike the one he had worn in the king’s office. Meanwhile, Erhart’s expression was the opposite—stern and pointed.

Yuri breezily went on. “I wonder if this means we’ll get more chances to talk with Sei from now on. I’m terribly interested in her powers.”

This magic, so different from Yuri’s own, fascinated him. He wanted to observe Sei up close and uncover just what separated her from the people of his own world. If she was indeed the Saint, countless more chances to talk to

her and study her magic during expeditions awaited him. This, of course, delighted Yuri.

Finally, he noticed Erhart's stern expression and steadfast silence.

Yuri chuckled. "Don't glare at me like that. Don't worry. I'm just going to have her put on a tiny bit of a show."

Erhart continued glaring.



“You must be quite fond of her by now,” Yuri mused.

“That isn’t it. I’m worried you’re going to *do* something to her.”

Yuri chuckled at Erhart’s unflagging frown. “Oh, that’s all? I heard you actually talked to her like you were a normal person and she was as well, and that’s so very unlike you. Which reminds me, your little brother is quite taken with her, too, isn’t he?”

It was indeed unusual for Erhart of all people to take interest in a woman. Perhaps the rumors really were true.

Immediately after performing the Saint Summoning Ritual, Yuri fell into a deep sleep. He had heard reports of what he missed, so he had a broad understanding of the situation. He had only really wanted more information about the Saint, but during the conversation, he happened to hear of the Hawke brothers’ growing intimacy with Sei.

High society largely believed the Hawke brothers had little to no interest in women. This was so well known that even Yuri had heard it, even though he had zero interest in such gossip. In fact, he had seen firsthand on several occasions that Erhart was, at best, curt with noble ladies.

Yet Yuri heard that this same icy, awkward Erhart had easily conversed with Sei while she visited the Royal Magi Assembly and, furthermore, that it seemed his interest in her extended beyond her magical powers.

This didn’t surprise only Yuri. It stunned the mages who witnessed Erhart’s softening as well, and for a time they whispered that spring had finally come for the magus. However, the rumors about Erhart’s younger brother Albert were far more credible, so the rumor didn’t last.

Yuri didn’t have much interest in anything besides magic. In fact, he wasn’t particularly interested in the other members of the Royal Magi Assembly, either, and didn’t know much about any of them. Since Yuri could use every type of magic, most of his experiments didn’t require cooperation, so he rarely got involved with his ostensible colleagues. However, as Erhart did all of the grand magus’s busywork and they had to talk to one another quite a bit, Yuri thought of him as a friend.

It was possible only Yuri felt that way, though. However, since this was one of the few relationships Yuri could even imagine classifying as “friendly,” he did want to avoid angering Erhart.

“I’m not going to hurt her,” he assured Erhart. “Especially since I imagine that if I did, I’d make you, your brother, the head researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, and all sorts of other people angry.” Yuri chuckled, but Erhart didn’t seem to entirely trust him.

The fact was that Yuri’s zeal for learning had caused problems before. On the surface, Erhart acted as if he took Yuri at his word, but inwardly, Erhart sighed with unhappiness, knowing he’d have to keep a watchful eye on the grand magus to ensure he didn’t stir up too much trouble.

Act 2:

Special Training

SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE AUDIENCE, I received a message from an official and had a meeting about my reward. At last, I obtained permission to enter the Forbidden Depository. Now I could read pretty much any of the books in there. There were only a select few I wasn't allowed to touch—only the king and prime minister were permitted to put their hands on those. I didn't really mind, though, since the books I wanted were related to herbs, and those were all fair game.

As for my other reward, it turned out they wanted to offer me classes on subjects other than magic as well. The official said I could study whatever I wanted, I just had to say the word. I kind of wound up taking advantage of that.

I kept coming up with idea after idea about what I'd like to study, and in the end, the official smartly handed me a document: a list of brief descriptions of a number of courses. There was actually quite a large number of options, and it looked like it would take some time to read the whole thing.

In the end, I said it was too hard to decide right away, so I asked if I could take the document back with me, select the courses I wanted, and contact the official again when I was ready to submit.

Once I got back to the institute and finished my work for the day, I read through the document. It covered a wealth of topics: the history of the Kingdom of Salutania, the current state of affairs in surrounding areas, economics, and even things like etiquette.

If I had my eye on the future, I wanted to know all sorts of things, especially if I ever wanted to leave the palace. As I sat in a corner of the institute, I wrote down what courses I thought I'd like to take on a notepad with a pen. Eventually, Johan came over to me.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Selecting courses."

“Excuse me?”

“For my reward. They said I could study all sorts of things.”

“I see.” Johan picked up one of the papers included in the document. “These sound like the courses at the academy.”

“They do?”

It turned out every one of the listed classes was indeed available at the Royal Academy. There were also some electives, and the official had said I could take as many of those as I liked.

More importantly, I tentatively asked which subjects were required for academy students. It turned out they were pretty much all of the ones I was already thinking of. I nodded, double-checking my notepad, which Johan grabbed out of my hand without warning.

“These are the ones you’re interested in, eh?” he asked.

“Y-yes.”

“Hmm. You’ve picked out quite a few.”

I was taken aback. I had only been writing down what interested me, but I realized now that if I actually did take all of them... Just how many hours were there in a day again? Even if I had different classes every day, based on my school experiences in Japan, I had a feeling this syllabus would end up comprising my entire work week.

“I guess there’s no way I could take all of these, huh?” I asked.

“Why not?”

“I don’t have the time, not with my job.”

For me to take all these classes *and* do my daily work, I would need thirty-six hours every day. Unfortunately, this world only had the classic twenty-four.

Dejected, I tried to decide which courses to drop when Johan surprised me. “By job, you mean your work at the research institute?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Work when you have the time, then.”

“Huh?” I stared at him in confusion.

He smiled and reminded me that everyone working at the institute had originally graduated from the Royal Academy, so they already had their education in the bag. However, while I had an exceptional education in the natural sciences, I wasn’t from this world, and I didn’t know all that much about the things characteristic to it. I was employed as a special case, but if I planned to continue working at the institute, it would probably be best if I increased my world knowledge and at the very least picked up the same knowledge base my colleagues had acquired as teens.

“Besides, you’ve been stuck on your research recently, haven’t you?”

“That’s true...”

Johan was right—I hadn’t made any headway in my extra-potent potion research.

I had found myself pursuing the topic because of my potions, which were fifty percent more effective than everyone else’s. Potions classified as better than “high-grade” hadn’t been developed in a long time. This was likely because there actually wasn’t much demand for even regular high-grade potions, and they cost a great deal to make, so there was little need *or* opportunity to develop stronger ones.

Then me and my extra-strength potions came along. Even though I used the exact same ingredients and used the exact same procedures, they were invariably exceptional. Also, with all the monster-slaying expeditions these days, the demand for more potent potions had risen.

At first, my colleagues were frantic to unravel the mystery of my potions, but we’d come to so many dead-ends that the research was at a standstill. Most of others had gone back to their old projects. However, a few were set on developing new brews and were still experimenting with changing ingredients, procedure, and the like. I was one of them.

And now, thanks to that Appraisal at the Royal Magi Assembly, I had a clue: my magic powers were different from everyone else’s. That had to be the reason my potions came out strange. I was relieved to finally have a lead, but at the same time I was disappointed, since that brought me back to square one

with my actual goals.

This also meant that since my magical powers were the likely cause, no one could reasonably be expected to replicate my work. I concluded that if I really wanted to develop a new potion, I needed to devise new methodology, or even compose an entirely new recipe.

Before this news about my magic, I had been experimenting with alternative ingredients, such as herbs that only grew in certain regions. I'd gathered information about medicines unique to those regions and checked old literature as well. I had gone again and again to the library in the royal palace and had read an astounding number of herbology books. When you tallied that together with the other researchers' reading lists, we had probably read every single book on the topic in the kingdom. However, we still had no idea how to go about inventing a whole new potion.

Or, rather, we did make some things that didn't blow up in our faces, but most of them had no measurable effect.

Johan was right; I was stuck. Although, I did hope I might find something in the Forbidden Depository now that I could finally get in there.

"Broadening your horizons might lead to new insights. I think this will be a good opportunity for you," Johan said.

He had a point. After all, in the end, it had turned out the answer to my question was one we'd dismissed ages ago: my magic.

My magic powers had come into question right in the beginning of our most fervent investigation. However, it was generally understood that an individual's elemental affinity had little to no impact on the outcome of the potions they brewed. If it expressed itself at all, it did so in such a small way that it was difficult to detect versus when someone cast an elemental spell—only someone trained in Appraisal could tell the elemental affinity of a potion's brewer.

As such, my colleagues had only ensured that I was indeed applying magic to create the potions, and that I did it at the same time and in the same amount that they did. Once they were satisfied that I was, they dropped the lead entirely. After all, they were far more interested in herbs and formulas, and therefore inclined to believe the answers lay in these components.

I had even less knowledge of magic than they did, so I just took what they said for granted without bothering to investigate any further. If I had known better, I probably would've looked into it more and figured this weirdness out much sooner.

Johan wasn't just right—he was *super* right. Knowledge was important.

My research might have needed a rehaul, but by learning more about the world, I might discover something else I had previously overlooked. Given that, I could basically see these classes as just another part of my work.

“See? Now take as many classes as you'd like. It's your reward, after all,” Johan said with a grin.

I nodded back with a smile.

A few days after I submitted my list of classes to the official from the palace, I attended my first day. He told me it would take some time to ready everything, so I started with less than a full course load.

My very first class would be on magic. I would go to a room in the palace and be instructed by several teachers on different topics. When we discussed the process, I worried having to travel to the palace every morning would be a pain, but they prepared a carriage for me, which I gratefully accepted. On my arrival, a maid led me to the classroom, and I mentally prepared myself while I waited for my teachers. A few moments later, there was a knock at the door.

I blinked in surprise at the person who entered.

“Good morning.” It was the grand magus himself. He swept in with a cheerful smile.

“Good morning. Uh...” I had heard my magic teacher would be from the Royal Magi Assembly, but no one said anything about the *grand magus*.

“I shall be your instructor in magic. My name is Yuri Drewes.”

“Um, but you're the grand magus, right?” I asked without even thinking.

“That is correct.”

Okay, so I hadn't made some huge mistake about who exactly he was. "And you're going to be my teacher today? Don't you have work?"

"No worries." Yuri kept smiling...but was it really okay for him to be here?

I had seen the office of the knight commander of the Third Order and he always seemed to have a ton of paperwork. He had even said that being buried under it all made it hard to keep up with his training and that he envied the regular knights.

I highly doubted the Royal Magi Assembly had *less* paperwork than that.

"Would you prefer another teacher?" Yuri interrupted my thoughts with a sorrowful look.

Of course not! I just felt bad for taking up his time. I mean, I was a complete beginner, less skilled than the first years at the academy. I doubted this Magic 101 was the sort of thing someone with the title of "grand magus" should teach—it would be like having a university professor trying to wrangle a junior high schooler.

When I asked whether he shouldn't have someone less important deal with me, he smiled with relief. "If that's your concern, then please don't worry yourself. And you know, there are reasons why others cannot be tasked with teaching you."

"There are?"

"Indeed. Speaking of, there is something I would like to ask of you."

"What would that be?"

"I would ask that you let me study your magic."

First, he wanted to conduct an investigation at the Royal Magi Assembly as to how and why my magical powers differed from those of the people of this world. In addition to helping slay monsters, the Assembly also studied magic, which Yuri vigorously participated in. Therefore, my magic was as compelling to him as potions were to me.

He had also heard of my peculiarly potent potions and likewise suspected my magic was the culprit and wanted to confirm the difference. Furthermore, he

wanted to determine in what other ways my magic produced varied effects. I also wanted to know these things, so I welcomed the assistance of this expert.

However, Yuri's curiosity only partly explained why he didn't want to entrust my lessons to others. We owed the rest of it to the fact that all matters concerning the abilities of the (potential) Saint were state secrets. Also, the palace didn't have many records about the previous Saints' abilities to begin with. Yuri didn't know *why* so few records existed, but he suspected it meant even past generations had strictly guarded information about the Saint.

As with my magical powers, the government had decided the fewer people who knew about this investigation, the better. Therefore, Yuri himself would oversee my tutelage. Not to mention, Yuri was the foremost expert on magic in the kingdom, so he was the perfect person to study me and teach me. The investigation itself wouldn't require anything in particular; he would merely observe my use of magic during class. I really couldn't see a problem.

That settled, I agreed. He thanked me with a brilliant smile.

Finally, we began our class. For the first few days, he taught me the basics—the nature of magical power, how we used our innate magical power to cast, and so on. I found Yuri's lessons incredibly easy to understand. His reputation for expertise was certainly warranted. I suspected he was more than just knowledgeable—he was, in fact, very *smart*. And he made an excellent teacher.

"Is there anything you didn't understand?" he asked once after he described a particular theorem.

"Nope, no questions."

"Then I'm sure you're tired of listening to me lecture. I think it's time for some practice."

"Ooh."

"Since you can already cast magic, I assume you know how to detect your magical power. However, understanding your power is the foundation of magic, so let's start from there."

Yuri then began describing a starter exercise, but I soon realized it was the same thing Jude had done when he taught me how to make potions.

“Um, actually...”

“Yes?”

“Is this that thing where you make your magic flow into someone else? That academy drill.”

“Oh, so you know it already? Indeed.” Yuri nodded as I told him what Jude had taught me. “So, someone has made their magic flow into you before. But have you ever made your own magic flow into someone else?”

“No, we only did it to help me feel my magical power.”

“I see. Then why don’t we try that today?”

Now it was my turn to give the whole magic-flow thing a go. Of course, I would be making my magic flow into Yuri, as we were the only two people in the room. We faced each other and placed our palms on top of one another’s at around chest height.

Wait, is it just me, or is he a bit close right now?

Maybe we’d each thought we had to cross the distance, and we had both misjudged? I was right about the closeness-factor. When I looked up from our palms, I found his strikingly pretty face far nearer than I thought, um, prudent.

Sensing my gaze, he looked up as well.

Oh, no.

Pretty faces had outrageous offensive capabilities—especially ones as attractive as Yuri’s. For some reason, I started feeling nervous, and my chest got tight.

“Is something the matter?” he asked with a smile.

“No...” I shook my head. *Calm down. Just focus on sending your magical power into him.*

I returned my gaze to our palms and pretended to straighten my posture to put a little more distance between us. I took a deep breath and focused my magical power into my right hand. Then, I released it from my palm the same way I did when imbuing potions with magic.

“Did I do it?” I asked.

“Yes. Faintly, but I can feel it. Can you try sending a bit more?”

“Okay.”

The amount I used for potions was pretty small, so I imagined myself gathering up my power and releasing it like the tide.

“Haaah,” Yuri murmured.

When I looked up, I found him wearing not his usual serene smile but one of absolute delight.

“Uh, Grand Magus?”

“Oh, my apologies. That was just rather interesting.”

“It was?”

“Indeed. Your magical power truly is different from ours.”

At the sound of my voice, his expression instantly returned to normal. Having seen him smile like that, though, it made me wonder if his usual expression was like some kind of mask. Maybe the smile I glimpsed was a part of his true self?

I peered at him quizzically, but he launched into an explanation about magical power rather than addressing my unspoken question.

He had told me before that everyone’s magical powers differed, and not just in terms of elemental affinity. It was hard to describe, he said, but some people could just *feel* the variation. However, versus elemental differences, this sort of variation was terribly slight and only about half of the members in the Royal Magi Assembly could even sense it. Of course, Yuri was one of them.

However, my magical power was *clearly* strange—not because of my holy affinity but because of something else. I couldn’t say I was surprised.

“Maybe it’s something particular to those who come from another world,” Yuri mused.

“But can we definitely say my magical power is what makes my potions and cooking more effective?”

“Hmm, I’d have to test some other hypotheses.”

“Ah. Okay.”

This was what I wanted to know more than anything, but he was right. We couldn't just assume. Too bad.

After that, Yuri had me practice controlling the amount of magical power I moved and asked me questions about how it felt as I did. All in all, it was a pretty tame first day of hands-on learning. That also meant it was the first day of Yuri's research into my magic, so I couldn't expect to have all the answers right away. But this felt like a promising path, so I told myself it was okay to take our time ensuring we found the right answers.

After that, we added time for practical skills to my lessons. Schedule-wise, that meant my classes were split fifty-fifty between lectures and actual casting. Of course, Yuri was my instructor for both.

The more hands-on learning took place on the practice grounds at the Royal Magi Assembly. It was kind of far from the lecture hall, but it didn't feel like a slog as I got to talk to Yuri while we walked there. If I had been alone, I probably would have been pretty put out, and not just because of the distance.

At first, I thought it was kind of a luxury having the grand magus himself as my personal tutor, but those feelings dissipated within a few days. Despite Yuri's breezy demeanor, he was actually a strict and relentless teacher.

“Let us begin. We'll proceed like we did last time.”

“Okay.”

We began the lesson almost as soon as we arrived. This time, it was on channeling my magical powers as he had described during the day's lecture. Supposedly, if I mastered this, I could cast spells more rapidly.

To use magic, I had to concentrate my powers into a spot, such as the palm of my hand. Proper channeling decreased the amount of time required to focus and build power.

However, if I were just working on channeling my Holy Magic, we wouldn't have needed to go all the way out to the practice grounds.

For one, channeling practice only really required concentrating my magic in different parts of my body, such as my arms or legs. However, Yuri thought this a rather pointless exercise on its own, so I was to practice casting while channeling.

For another, we weren't just using Holy Magic. Sure, that was the only kind I could use, but a certain someone else possessed multiple elemental affinities, which were best wielded in an open space. Who was that person, you ask? Why, Grand Magus Yuri, of course.

Yuri was profoundly skilled, even for someone from the Royal Magi Assembly. He could cast three different kinds of elemental spell one after the other, smoothly channeling his magical power the whole time. For reference, he could cast two spells in the time it took me to cast one.

Yuri said my goal was to cast as fast as he did, but I felt like that was pushing it, to say the least. I had only just started studying magic, after all. When I focused on speed, I fumbled with my channeling, and sometimes I didn't cast the spell at all.

And then there was his running commentary.

"Can't you do it a little bit quicker?" he asked with a smile.

"I'm going as fast as I can. Slow down, would you?"

He chuckled. "Ah, but I already have."

Are you kidding? I barely kept up. I understood I could match his speed *in theory*, but it was easier said than done.

It frustrated me, to tell the truth. Making potions required subtle manipulation of magic, so I thought I'd be pretty good at it, seeing as I was such a master of that art. To my disappointment, that was not the case. Proper channeling required far more complex command of my power. I still had a long way to go before I reach the pace Yuri wanted from me.

However, I soon gathered from the other mages that Yuri likely noticed my frustration and that he was actually going easy on me. Those mages told me that when he was *their* teacher, he was far more draconian.

“Never again...” one of them said with this glazed look in his eye. “Never again...”

He was referring to an incident that had occurred just after the whole Royal Magi Assembly had finished a mountain of paperwork.

“I’ve been thinking it’s about time I pass on some of my skills to my subordinates,” Yuri had declared with an unusually cheerful smile.

A small army of proud and ambitious mages—the conspicuously powerful and other elites—had gathered at the practice grounds, lured by the promise of training from the head of the Royal Magi Assembly. Later, an equal number of twitching bodies littered the field.

Yuri’s training was so grueling that these elites begged for mercy in the span of a single day. Some dared to complain that his training was overly brutal and that he should ease the learning curve, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. You see, this training had been a bit lighter than Yuri’s usual gauntlet—the one he ran when he wanted to hone his already extreme talents.

While the other mages dropped like flies, Yuri practiced the same drills with an unruffled air while throwing out specific words of guidance to every mage who remained. He kept it up for about a week.

It seemed all of the paperwork had left Yuri without time for his research, which had in turn left him with some, hm, pent-up anger. I worried that maybe he had just taken his anger out on his colleagues, but they assured me his advice always hit the mark, and those who survived his special training came away impressed by their own progress. No one could really complain after.

However, after that incident, the amount of paperwork that reached the grand magus’ desk drastically decreased.

Nevertheless, I felt quite sorry for the mage as he recalled these events with a harrowed look.

Given this report of Yuri’s training from hell, it seemed he really was going easy on me to match my skill level. He believed I could do what he demanded. So, you know, it frustrated me when I failed to meet his expectations.

In that case, I have to focus on these drills.

For a whole week of classes, I did nothing but practice channeling and cast magic. However, I just couldn't go as fast as Yuri.

It's probably going to take a lot of time to get this if I limit myself to practicing during class. I should probably do drills in my free time, too. Hm, but won't that get a bit repetitive?

It felt like a waste to keep casting Heal on myself all alone on the practice grounds.

Should I cast it on someone else like I did at the hospital? I'd get the practice, and they'd get healed. Two birds with one stone, right?

It was a pretty good idea, if I do say so myself, so the next morning, I went straight to Johan to ask for permission. It was pretty early, but I found him in his office already busy with work. I told him how my classes were going and asked for permission to visit the hospital or somewhere like it for more training.

Johan rubbed his chin in consideration before offering me an answer. "I'm having a bit of trouble. The practice is fine, but the place..."

"The hospital's no good, then?"

"You healed practically everyone last time you visited, didn't you? I don't think they have enough patients to warrant another visit."

Darn, that was right. And here I'd thought I was being so clever. Then another idea hit me. "How about the knights?"

The knights of the Orders practiced at their barracks when not out on expeditions. I had seen them at it once, when I went to deliver potions. With all their close-quarters combat practice, they were always covered in bruises. Perhaps they could serve as my practice partners, too.

When I proposed this to Johan, he said, "Yes, that's perfect. I'll go ahead and let Al know, so feel free to head over to the Third Order's barracks after classes today."

"Thank you!"

After magic class ended that day, I headed to the barracks. As I made my way

to Knight Commander Albert's office, it seemed like every knight I bumped into bemoaned how long it had been since my last visit—admittedly, I had been busy, and it had been a while.

I knocked on the door to Albert's office, gave my name, and he told me to come in. When I stepped inside, Albert smiled. "Long time no see."

"I'm sorry—so much has been going on lately."

Before I started my classes, Albert and I had run into each other all the time, like when I delivered potions from the institute or was on my way back there from the library. However, we rarely saw each other now, since these days I only ever really went to class or the institute.

As I walked in, Albert stood from his chair to greet me.

"Is it just me, or have you lost some weight?" he asked as he tenderly touched my cheek.

It caught me off guard, so I was taken aback for a moment as blood rushed to my face.

"Huh? No? At least, I don't think so." I somehow managed to answer despite my mind going blank. I just started babbling every word that popped into my head. *I really wish you would stop with these surprise attacks! It's going to give me a heart attack one of these days.*

"I heard Yuri Drewes has been instructing you. That can't be easy."

"Th-that's for sure. But his lectures are great."

"I see. Well, as long as he's not making you push yourself too far."

"No, it's fine."

I had assumed Albert would remove his fingers from my face, but instead he stroked my cheek while we talked.

My face is so hot. If you keep this up, my heart is absolutely going to stop.

I had glanced away awkwardly before, but as he continued not removing his fingers, I looked back at him. His smile deepened. It was almost as if he were holding back the urge to burst out laughing. Worse, he took my look as the

signal to tentatively brush his hand past my ear and away. It tickled, sending a shiver down my spine. I wanted brownie points for not yelping. I was internally on the verge of tears as I scowled at Albert.

He laughed again. The nerve! “Anyway,” he said, “Johan said you wanted to practice your magic with us, right?”

“Y-yes.” I was relieved to get to the point. “If I may, I’d like to join you all on your practice grounds.”

“That sounds great. Were you hoping to start today?”

“If that’s all right.”

He said of course it was and that he would walk me there.

As we went down a hallway to the barracks, I itched to ask him what that touchy-feely hello was all about. Johan already teased me more than enough, but now Albert was in on it as well? Come on!

I pouted at Albert, still steaming about it. He noticed my gaze and smiled—a most charming smile, at that. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” I answered a bit curtly, but Albert didn’t push it. Probably because I was blushing.



To distract myself, I started describing my recent practice. He told me a bit about how the knights' own practice sessions went so I could figure out when would be best to offer my magical services.

When we arrived at the practice grounds, the knights were already in the middle of a mock battle. Though we first spotted them from a distance, as we got closer, the whole mood got way more intense. I was seriously impressed, though the second they noticed Albert and I had arrived, they stopped fighting to give us their attention.

I knew all of them, but it was still a bit nerve-racking to have everybody look at me like that. I took a step back to hide behind Albert. He spoke in a loud, commanding voice to explain that starting that day, I would be doing my own exercises while they practiced. At intervals during their drills, they would come to me and I would heal them.

This was all Albert's idea. At first, I had thought I'd just treat the injuries of whoever came over to me, but Albert argued that would be ineffective. The knights were used to letting their light bruises heal on their own and wouldn't bother coming over to me if that was all they earned at practice. If I wanted to cast as many spells as possible, we needed to take a different approach.

Hence the intervals. I would determine when I thought everybody could use a magical pick-me-up, and I could model it after the healing intervals mages regularly followed on actual expeditions.

Once Albert explained, the knights resumed training. I observed the mock battle for a time, trying to figure out when I should call everyone over. It would have been a lot easier if this were a game where everyone had an HP bar showing their max and current health, but unfortunately, I didn't have such a cheat. I had to just cast Heal on whoever got obviously hurt or anyone who seemed like they were flagging.

As I did, I kept thinking about the proper channeling of my magical power, trying to pick up the speed with which I cast my spells. I worried that since I spent less time casting than I had in the hospital, where I focused on gathering a ton of magic, I wasn't healing them all that much. But if I could just get better at this, I would be able to replicate the kind of feat I performed at the hospital, but

faster and with greater efficiency.

Time passed in the blink of an eye. Before I knew it, the knights wrapped up their training for the day.

Albert had gone back to his office for a time, but he returned to tell me I could come back to practice whenever I liked.

And then a week had gone by.

Thanks to my extra training, I felt like I was getting just a little bit faster. Intriguingly, my spells were a touch stronger, too. Even the knights could tell I was casting with greater speed.

To my gratification, Yuri noticed as well. "You've improved quite a bit."

"Thank you!"

"And even faster than I anticipated. Have you been putting in extra hours?" The way he smiled told me he already knew exactly what I'd been up to.

I chuckled guiltily. "Just a little."

"It seems to me you've been working yourself to the bone. Did you have a particular goal in mind?"

"Uh, not really," I said vaguely.

In truth, part of it was because my competitive streak was triggered by having Yuri casually cast all those spells in rapid succession like it was nothing. However, the other part...

"It's just you never know when they'll ask me to join them on one of the monster-slaying expeditions."

When I added this, Yuri blinked in surprise.

Johan and I had talked about it before, and I thought it more than likely they would ask me soon, considering the results of the last two expeditions. Improving my ability to channel my magic would yield the most critical results on the battlefield. After all, there wasn't much need for me to be fast in a hospital setting.

"You plan to join the expeditions, then?" Yuri asked.

“Yeah, when the time comes.”

“When the time comes? You’re not aiming for some other outcome, then?”

“Hmm, not that I can think of?”

“Then what’s the point of all the blood, sweat, and tears?”

The point? I frowned, puzzled. What *was* I doing this for? Was I hoping for a special reward since it was above and beyond my usual work?

Putting that aside, Yuri still looked rather taken aback by my answer. Was he *not* training me to be shipped off to battle?

All this practice had been his idea in the first place, with him saying I needed to be able to do more than just properly channel my magic. I had been so sure he wanted to prepare me to join the expeditions, given that my abilities would be so useful during them. Was I wrong?

“This isn’t all about monster slaying, then?”

It was his turn to frown at me. “No, of course not.”

“Then why train me?”

“Firstly, everyone ought to develop better control over their magic. Secondly...I simply wished to observe your development.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” He answered in such a matter-of-fact way, but I was surprised anyway.

Yuri really did just want to observe me. He had said as much when we started, but I hadn’t really thought it was his *true* purpose. I couldn’t help but feel drained.

“Though I suppose you’re right that the knights may request your assistance at some point,” Yuri said, after thinking it over for a moment.

I somehow felt like I had dug my own grave. “You think so?”

“A few of the assembly mages can use Holy Magic, but their levels aren’t particularly impressive.”

“Can you use Holy Magic?”

“Of course. However, I’m primarily an offensive asset during expeditions.”

That made sense. I probably had a higher level in Holy Magic than anyone in the kingdom.

Also, I got the feeling Mr. Grand Magus here was the sort to charge in without thinking. I mean, he was the top mage in the Royal Magi Assembly. If he considered himself an “offensive asset,” he probably didn’t sit around giving commands.

“If your aid *is* requested, you’ll likely be asked to go to the western forest,” Yuri said.

“Oh?”

“Considering your level, it shouldn’t be a problem for you.”

“But that’s where...” I frowned.

The western forest was where the salamander had appeared, the fearsome monster that had left dozens of knights grievously injured in its wake.

“The miasma is dense in the western forest, too. I’m curious to see what effect your magic will have on it. Also...” Seemingly oblivious to my concern, Yuri mused on the research he had already done in the western forest.

From my perspective, the number of casualties yielded from the last two expeditions to the western forest were deeply troubling, and I was rightly scared. However, Yuri acted like the western forest wasn’t anything to write home about. Now that I thought about it, the knights said it was unusual for so many people to be injured in the western forest, so maybe it wasn’t *actually* that dangerous of a place?

But you know what they say, bad things come in threes...

I was still frowning while Yuri muttered on to himself, but then our eyes met. “Is there something the matter?” he asked.

“No, uh,” I hesitated. Would he even hear my concerns?

I think Yuri guessed what I was thinking without my having to say it. He smiled gently. “Of course, as I’ve said before, I believe any expedition blessed with your assistance would, considering your level, sail through any trouble.”

“You really think so?”

“I do. I’ve been to the western forest numerous times myself, though lately I’ve not been able to join any groups.”

“Oh.”

“I heard there were a great number of monsters last time around, and I believe I would have greatly enjoyed being a part of it, but unfortunately, I was asleep, as you know.”

I fell silent.

“Considering what happened last time, I’m sure it won’t be long before the knights head there again. The monsters may be back *en force*—or, I suppose, there may be fewer than usual. Either way, it would be an excellent opportunity for your first battle.” Yuri smiled reassuringly.

To me, the fact that he thought he’d have fun during any expedition spoke to his strength. Though, having seen the state of the knights on their return, I lacked complete confidence in his attitude.

But I *could* agree with his prediction for the next expedition. There were likely more monsters there now, especially as the knights had waited so long to return. Based on that, their next trip to the western forest would be soon.

I kept silent as I considered this. Yuri took it for brooding, because he added, “Don’t worry. I’ll be on the next expedition as well.”

“You will?”

“But of course. I won’t allow you to get a single scratch—I will protect you.”

I smiled awkwardly. If he were anyone else, I would have been pleased by the prospect of protection. But I wasn’t happy. Not at all. To me, his words sounded more like: “I would never allow any damage to befall my *research subject*.”

Act 3:

Lady

ONE MORNING, I woke up much earlier than usual—it was Lady's Day. Or at least, that was what I called it. It wasn't a special holiday or anything like that. On Lady's Days, I took classes on the sort of things noble ladies were expected to know, such as etiquette and dance.

I also had to wake up earlier on those days. I'd thought I could just wear my regular clothes for class, because it wasn't like I attended a weekly ball or anything, but I was firmly scolded all around—especially by my dance teacher and the maids.

My teacher also held the opinion that I should get used to wearing "proper" attire, which obligated me to dress all fancy every Lady's Day. I got the feeling the maids kind of enjoyed dolling me up. I couldn't really argue with my teacher, either, so I spent those days entirely decked out.

It wasn't just elaborate dresses, you see; the maids also did my makeup and hair before meticulously arranging me from head to toe. All in all, it took quite a while to finish. Therefore, I had to get up before the sun.

I hauled myself out of bed, freshened up, and headed to the palace with the sun still lingering on the horizon. The maids awaited me in the room set aside especially for this ordeal, which came complete with a many-hued sea of gowns, shoes, and accessories. The palace provided the entire wardrobe, and I never ceased to be amazed by how perfectly it all fit me.

I really wanted to believe none of it had been tailored especially for me. Part of me wanted to ask the official to be sure, but I was scared to find out that wasn't the case, as I already felt guilty every time I put on any of these lovely things. By and large, I got by with telling myself I was borrowing things the palace just happened to have stocked.

The maids always enjoyed debating which rental dress I would wear.

"They all seem to be having fun," I said with a wry chuckle to Mary, the leader

of the maids, who stood next to me.

She responded with an equally wry laugh, “Well, they get to choose from so many gowns, after all.”

The maids who waited on me every Lady’s Day were, again, the same maids who had attended me after my summoning, as well as the ones who’d helped me prepare for the audience. I kind of worried they were specially assigned to me.

Mary was slightly older than me and had worked at the palace for a long time. She could be strict when guiding the other maids in their duties, but in general, she was quite sociable. It was probably because we were so close in age, but I found her the easiest one to talk to.

While the maids selected my dress, they discussed all sorts of things—the latest fashions in the palace, sweets, you know—until one of them finally brought me their choice.

“Would this please you today?”

It was a soft saffron-colored dress. I liked the relative simplicity of the design, but the color was so heartbreakingly lovely that I worried it would be too flashy.

“You don’t think it’s too vibrant for me?” I asked Mary.

“Of course not. See?” She held the dress in front of me so I could see in the mirror. She was right. It didn’t look as bad as I had feared. It maybe even didn’t look bad at all.

“You all really know your stuff,” I murmured in appreciation.

Dress decided, next came makeup and hair. I let the maids do all the work for this part. They always made me look far prettier than I could ever manage on my own. I only asked them to keep my makeup light.

While they colored my cheeks and lips, they also picked out shoes and accessories to match my gown. Since I spent most of the makeup-application time with my eyes closed, I had no idea what they were debating. From their voices, I could tell they were having as much fun as they had when choosing my dress.

I totally got it, though—it had to be fun getting to piece together an outfit from so many options. Back in Japan, I was so busy with work that I rarely had time to go clothes or accessory shopping, but when I did, I enjoyed taking my time checking out everything available. The maids were enjoying a similar experience.

But, well, it was a different story when you were the one wearing the outfit. The dresses provided by the palace all reflected my tastes to a degree, so they had largely “simple” designs. However, that was “simple” by the standards of Salutania—by Japanese standards, even the most unembellished of these gowns was luxurious.

The Japanese part of me remained awestruck by the beauty of the dresses I got to wear here. I always had the option to decline a given dress, but I found myself unable to do so when faced with the excitement of the maids. Therefore, I always gave up and had to pretend the jewels adorning what I ended up wearing couldn’t possibly be real.

The biggest problem, though, wasn’t the dresses or the accessories. Once the maids finished my makeup, it was time to actually put on the dress—*that* was the hard part.

“Here we go,” Mary warned before she pulled the laces.

I managed to stifle a reflexive groan.

By laces, I meant she was tightening my corset. Bone-breakingly thin waists were the aesthetic ideal in Salutania, and noble ladies attained them by tightening corsets to extremes. Since I had come from another world and wasn’t used to corsets, the waists of my dresses were allowed to be on the broad side by this kingdom’s standards. The maids were also careful not to tighten them to deathly degrees.

Despite that, I couldn’t help but cry out when they cinched away. It was so painful that I absolutely understood why all those historical ladies had fainted all the time.

And here I’d thought that losing weight after I arrived in this world meant I would be able to brush off this trial no sweat. Boy, was I wrong. I never imagined they would hurt so much.

After the first minute or so, I would grow accustomed to the ache, but my breathing stayed shallow. *Maybe it'll stop hurting altogether if I get more used to them?*

Mary finished tying the laces and I went limp.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes." The truth was that I wanted to scream and cry uncle, but I held it back. I prayed that one day I'd surpass this hardship.

Once the corset was tied, next came the dress. Things sped up at this point, and soon I was ready to head to class.

My morning class was on etiquette. I learned the appropriate way to walk, greet someone, decline and accept an invitation, and all sorts of things for proper conduct. It took a surprising amount of endurance to get through it all.

Elegant manners required muscles I didn't normally use. My knees trembled while my posture was endlessly corrected as I learned to perform a more perfect bow. Also, I didn't get enough exercise, so it was a bit rough. The tight corset definitely didn't do me any favors.

My instructor for this subject was top-notch; her usual pupils were the high-ranking children of nobles. Consequently, her teaching style was fairly strict. However, when I managed to move as she'd taught me, my movements were stunningly elegant and refined, so it was totally worth it.

"You have improved quite a bit," she said as I practiced my curtsy.

"Ah, thank you!"

Since she was usually so demanding, every scrap of praise delighted me.

When I started, I had wondered if I really needed to master etiquette so thoroughly, but I was the type to be kind of a perfectionist with new skills, so I ended up not being able to help myself.

It sure seemed tough being a noble who had to be aware of all these little rules at all times, though. Maybe it wasn't that bad once you got the hang of it.

In the afternoon, I had dance lessons. First, I learned the correct way to carry myself in a dance, and then we started on beginner steps. Recently, I had

gotten good enough to actually perform a full movement with my teacher every now and again.

According to him, this class was meant to be kind of fast-paced, and certainly I was constantly sore because of it. The movements weren't especially acrobatic or anything, so I didn't have to use as much stamina as I thought I would, but the posture was demanding. I had no idea if I could ever become actually good, or if I would just be passable. As such, I took to secretly practicing in my room every day. I thought it might be best to put some oomph into it while I could.

That day, it was just me and the teacher in a single wide room. We started with learning new steps and ended the lesson with a paired dance.

My teacher counted out the tempo as I moved, until there was a knock at the door. No one had ever interrupted one of my lessons. I drew to a halt as my teacher answered. To my surprise, Knight Commander Albert entered.

"Did something happen?" I asked, worried.

He smiled in a somewhat bashful way. "Sorry, I didn't realize you were in the middle of your lesson. I haven't come for a particular reason, I just wanted to see how you were doing. Would it be all right if I watched?"

Huh? He wants to watch? I could manage not to step all over my teacher, but it wasn't anything worth *watching*. The prospect of him seeing that embarrassed me, so I wanted to tell him no, but my teacher beat me to the punch.

"Why, if it isn't Lord Hawke. How gracious of you to stop by. Would you like to join us?"

I looked back at him in surprise. *What do you mean by "join us"?*

My teacher smiled at me. "It will help you to practice with new partners."

"If you say so..."

I understood my teacher was the expert, but I had only just started being able to dance in a pair at all. Not to mention, I could only do it because my teacher led the way. How would I manage with Albert? I was dubious to say the least, but my teacher and Albert both seemed eager.

Hmm. Albert's been doing this kind of stuff since he was a kid, so maybe it'll be okay? I don't think I make a fool of myself with my teacher, either.

I was still at a loss, but Albert stretched his hand toward me. I glanced between his hand and the gentle smile on his face.

My heart fluttered in my throat. It would be rude to refuse his hand at this point, right? I inhaled deeply, gathering my resolve, straightened my posture, and placed my left hand in his outstretched palm. He gracefully drew me toward him.

In a fluid motion, Albert placed his right hand on my left shoulder. I placed my left hand on his right arm and found myself breathless when I looked up at him.

I-I can't believe how close we are right now... I mean, I knew this was the intended ultimate outcome of my lessons. I did know, okay?! And we'd ridden the same horse together time and time again, and we'd even had to sit really close to one another in a cramped carriage when we went into the capital, so I thought I was used to being so close to Albert, but—but it was *different* when we were face to face like this.

Before, I had only sat next to him, or he'd been seated directly behind me, like on the horse. But now... None of that compared to how self-conscious I felt standing right in front of him.

So I just stood there, staring up at him, frozen in place.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, a smile on his face.

"Uh, no," I managed. I dropped my gaze to his chest. *My ears are so hot. Calm down, me. We're in the middle of a lesson.*

I took another deep breath, settling my nerves before I raised my face again. Albert likely realized I was flustered, but he graciously pretended not to notice.

"Begin."

At the teacher's instruction, we took the first step. I followed Albert's lead. Although I was a bit stiff, the fact that we managed to dance at all was thanks to his considerate, confident direction.

However, I couldn't rely solely on him. I forced myself to think on everything I

had learned so I could put it to use.

A little while later, I heard Albert's voice above my head. "Are you feeling more relaxed now?"

"Yes..." I said. *Just kidding. I'm still one, big, vibrating ball of nerves.*

My gaze drifted every which way, revealing the turmoil in my heart. And here I had managed to finally forget who I was dancing with by focusing on the steps! Now my heart raced again.

If Albert noticed, he didn't comment. "I heard you never danced back in Japan."

"That's right. I didn't have the opportunity for that sort of thing. Not to mention, we dance quite a bit differently there."

I had participated in a couple events while I was a student, but those had been folk dances for athletic festivals and our regional Bon Festival. Those weren't even the same *kinds* of dances they taught me here.

"So you only just started learning."

"Yup."

"You must have a talent for it then, considering how well you carry yourself."

"Huh? No way, I really doubt that." I realized this was flattery, but I didn't know how to respond.

Albert chuckled.

I guess he was just teasing me. Hmph! I pouted, a bit annoyed, but that just made him laugh more.

"You started these classes after your audience with the king, right? I wasn't able to move half so smoothly in my first months."

"Ah... My teacher said my classes are going at a faster pace than usual because there'll be a chance for me to join some upcoming event or something."

However, I wasn't a noble, just a worker in the palace's research institute, so I doubted I would actually receive an invitation.

That was wishful thinking, I admit. Things didn't work my way so often in the real world, after all. I mean, I did just have to push through that audience with the king.

I was only taking these lessons because I was interested. If they had been preparation for official presentation at court or something, I would've flatly refused to join them, regardless of any official recommendation.

"The social season starts in the next few months," Albert said.

"Social season? You guys have that sort of thing?"

"Indeed. There are a number of parties in the capital during the season. I'm sure you'll be invited to some."

Augh, I knew it. It was all good fun to dance in relative privacy like this, but I was leery at the thought of going to some sparkly ball.

Unconsciously, I made a face, and Albert burst out laughing again. "There's only one or two you'll have to attend no matter what. You can turn down all the other invitations."

"But you're saying I'll definitely have to attend at least one?"

"Yes, the one hosted by the king."

"Oh, well..."

Fine, I could see that. I couldn't just turn down an invitation from the sovereign of our nation. Although I understood this, that didn't make me any happier about it. If any party was going to be compulsory, I wished it were a bit smaller.

"I'm not that big a fan of parties myself, but..." Albert trailed off, prompting me to look up at his face.

Uh, why are you looking at me like that? He wore such a tender gaze, and my pulse hammered.

"I'd like to be your escort to any you attend," he whispered, bringing his face just a bit closer to mine.

I-It's not fair to whisper so seductively!

I frowned at him critically, but it didn't seem to have any effect—he merely continued to wait for my response with a smile on his lips.

Before I could say anything, my teacher announced our dance had come to an end. My lesson was over for the day.

I was relieved to hear my teacher say I had done relatively well for my first dance with someone else—I had been afraid he would call me out for having my head in the clouds. I said my goodbyes and absentmindedly watched as my teacher and Albert exchanged pleasantries.

My escort, huh?

I had considered the possibility of being invited to parties, but I hadn't thought about the escort angle. Maybe I wasn't allowed to attend by myself? I also didn't like the thought of being the only single person among pairs when I arrived. I worried people would look at me weirdly.

Maybe I should go with Albert, since he so graciously offered. But if he's my escort, does that mean I'll have to dance with him again? Could I survive that?

"Sei?" Albert interrupted my distress, looking a bit concerned.

My teacher had already left the room, so it was just the two of us.

"Sorry, I was just...thinking," I said.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, um... About what you said, about being my escort..."

The word "escort" made him look even more concerned. Did I look too disconcerted? Sorry about that.

"Well, if you don't mind," I said, "then I'd like to take you up on that offer."

His face lit up. "Really?! Of course, I wouldn't mind at all."

Okay, okay, I felt all warm and fuzzy to see him so pleased.

And anyway, I hadn't been invited to any parties yet, so who knew if we'd really go to one together? But making arrangements in advance was probably a good idea. Even if we hadn't spoken on the topic then, I figured I probably would've wound up asking Albert through Johan. Not to mention, since I'd

never been to a party, I would feel much better going with someone who knew the ropes. So, in a way, this was one less thing to worry about.

In fact, I had made an excellent decision.

With that, a glowing Albert walked me all the way back to my changing room.

It was another Lady's Day, but it was different from usual.

"No class today?" I asked.

"That's right," Mary confirmed.

Oh no, did my teacher have an emergency or something? I thought as one of the maids carried over a tray with an envelope on it.

Mary took the tray from the maid and politely held it out to me. "Today, you have an assignment."

"Eh?"

Mary didn't say anything more, so I took the envelope and turned it over. It was closed with a pressed wax seal. I assumed it was some family's crest, but whose? I was sure I had seen it before. In class, I had been studying the crests of the kingdom's major noble families. If I recognized it, it had to be one of those.

At least it definitely wasn't the royal family's crest—I absolutely knew that one.

Still drawing a blank, I had Mary break the seal to read the contents of the letter inside. It was an invitation to a tea party being held that very afternoon at...the royal palace?! Whoever was inviting me had to hold an impressively high position to be able to host a tea party here.

Who in the world could this be from? I wondered. The sender hadn't included their name. *Am I supposed to deduce who it is based on the family crest on the seal? Augh, but I don't remember whose it is!*

"Lady Sei, how would you like to wear this dress today?" One of the maids called for my attention, snapping me out of my reverie.

I considered the dress she was holding up. "Well, I've received an invitation

for a tea party this afternoon.”

“Is that so? Then let’s go for a slightly more eye-catching affair.”

“Huh? Wait!”

It seemed Mary hadn’t known the contents of the assignment. Before I had a chance to stop her, she was already ordering the maids about.

Soon, they had laid out a dress several times more elaborate than the kind I usually chose. Seeing the maids even more fired up than usual, I didn’t have it in me to stop them, either.

While they were busy getting everything ready, I hunkered down to scrunch my brow and rack my brain, trying to solve my crest riddle.

“Is something the matter?” Mary asked worriedly.

“I just can’t figure out who sent the invitation. There’s no name,” I said as I handed her the envelope and letter.

Mary examined both in surprise. “Ah. How odd.”

“Is my assignment to guess the host?”

“Perhaps, but it might also be to conduct yourself properly at the party.”

Oof. She was probably right. I had been learning manners for this sort of thing and wondered if I was at the point of being able to conduct myself at the real deal.

I still didn’t know who had invited me, but if I *was* being tested, there was a good chance Mary wouldn’t help me identify the family crest even if I asked her. I did, just in case.

“Of course,” she said, “they’re quite famous. That is the crest of Marquis Ashley.”

I was surprised to hear it. Not many families held the title of marquis, so I felt like I really should have remembered. Did I know anyone from that family?

“It is most likely the young miss of the Ashley family who invited you,” Mary offered.

“Really?”

“Yes. She is Prince Kyle’s fiancée.”

Wait, that Prince Kyle? The crown prince? Huh. So even he of all people has a fiancée.

The age of majority in this kingdom was fifteen, plus, you know, he was a prince. This young engagement probably wasn’t too unusual, even if it would have been strange back in Japan.

However, his fiancée was permitted to hold tea parties at the palace? That seemed unusual. Could it be she was already living with the prince in the palace?

When I asked as much, I was told:

“No, she usually resides in the Ashley mansion.”

“Yet she’s hosting a tea party here?”

“Well, I believe she took an interest in your class.”

Mary suspected Lady Ashley had heard about me from my teacher. I supposed that made sense. If her invitation was part of my assignment, she was also in on it. Hopefully, that meant this tea party wouldn’t be that big of a deal.

For a minute there, I had feared it might be a huge to-do, since it was being held on royal grounds. No matter how prepared I might be to join a real tea party, going to one with tons of people was the last thing I wanted to do. I breathed a sigh of relief.

While Mary and I had puzzled this out, my makeup and hair were being worked on, and I was now ready. As I looked myself over in the mirror, I could tell the maids had put even more effort than usual into prettying me up.

They looked like they felt truly accomplished.

For my part...I really didn’t look like myself. The me in the mirror smiled somewhat tiredly.

“What do you think?” one of the maids asked.

“I think you did a tremendous job,” I said in my most elegant tone.

The maids were delighted by my response. Least I could do.

Finally, I headed to my morning lesson. Afterward, I usually would have gone to lunch. Instead, I headed straight to the tea party. From what my teacher had said during my morning lesson, the only people at the party would be the hostess and myself, so I no longer felt nearly as nervous as before.

I also learned Lady Ashley was a former student of my teacher, which was how she wound up helping me out. Since being the daughter of a marquis was rather high status, they normally wouldn't be asked to help out with this kind of thing, but Lady Ashley was good-natured and immediately offered her time.

I was grateful for her kindness, yet at the same time, a bit nervous to have someone so high-ranking judging me like this. Would we even have anything to talk about? I had chatted with Mary and the other maids about recent trends in fashion, so I *might* be able to talk about what was currently in vogue. Just a bit, though.

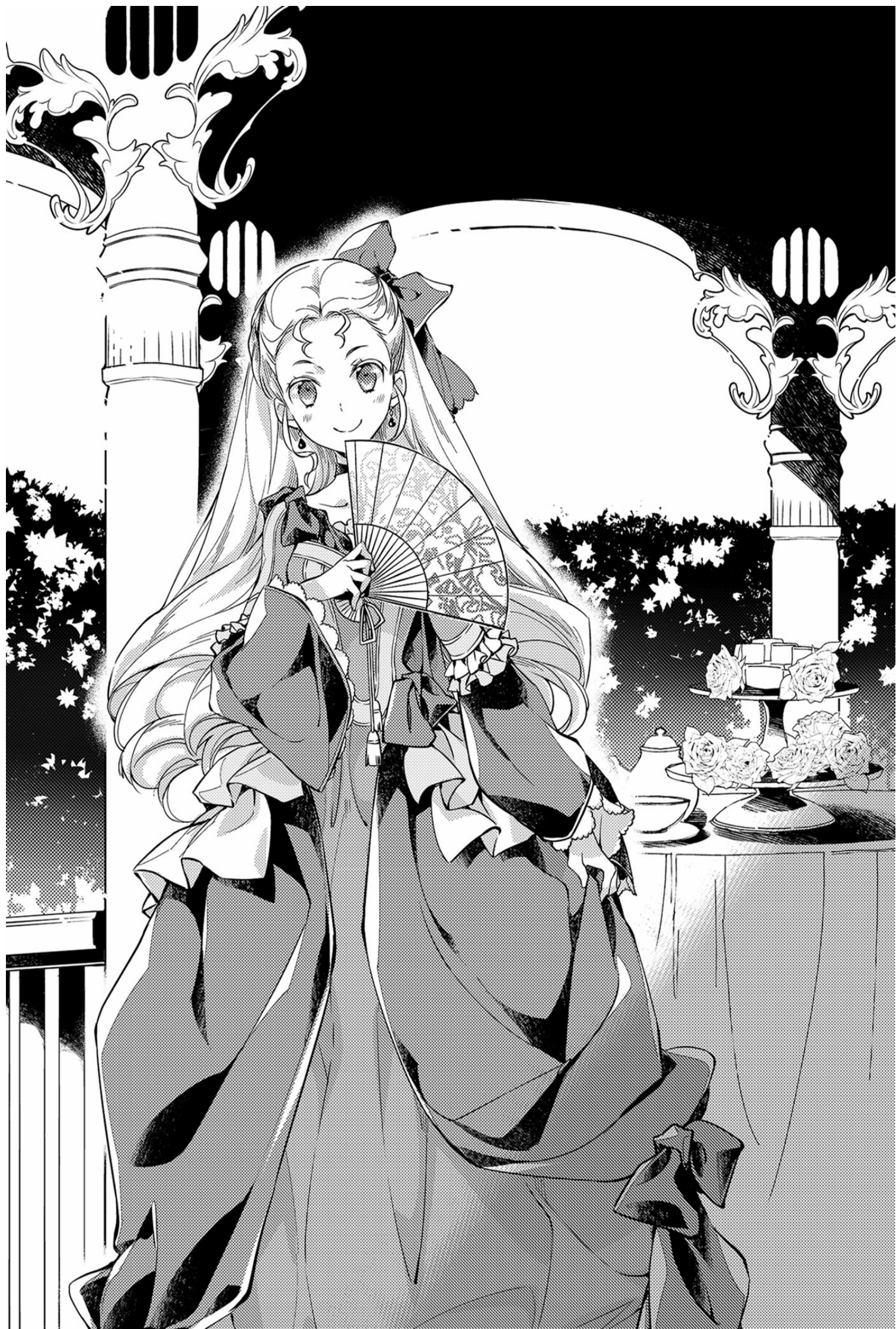
The tea party was being held at a gazebo in the gardens. We were to chat while enjoying the autumn setting. Mary led me through the exquisitely manicured flower beds, bushes, and trees, until I spotted the gazebo in the distance. The girl who was no doubt my hostess already sat there.

When she noticed my approach, she stood up and came to meet me on the lawn.

I gasped when I saw her face. "Liz?"

Now *this* was a girl I knew quite well.

"Welcome to my tea party, Sei," Liz said with a smile, as lovely as ever. There was something self-satisfied about that smile, though, as if she were saying, "Hah! Got you!"



“Um, thank you for inviting me today?” I managed to greet her, but I accidentally lifted my voice in an inflection at the end. I hoped she didn’t mind. I was just shocked to see her.

Liz encouraged me to join her and sit, and the maids attending us set about pouring our tea.

I watched them in a mild daze as Liz spoke. “This is the first time I have ever seen you wearing such a dress. It is most refreshing to see you looking so beautifully appointed.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess so.”

“You look wonderfully pretty. This suits you.”

“You really think so?”

“I do!”

I was self-conscious at her praise, but that wasn’t what was really bugging me. “So you’re Lady Ashley then?”

I had been invited by a “Lady Ashley,” and Liz had called this “her tea party,” which meant she was indeed the lady in question—but I couldn’t remember how she had introduced herself way back when in the library. Had she said her name was “Elizabeth *Ashley*”? I had just been calling her “Liz” ever since, so I had completely forgotten her family name.

Liz smiled at my puzzlement. “Did I forget to tell you?”

“I didn’t know you were the daughter of a *marquis*,” I said dejectedly, which made her giggle.

She had neglected to tell me on purpose, hadn’t she?

“I heard you were holding this tea party for me as an assignment,” I said.

“That’s right. I haven’t seen you at the library at all of late, so when I heard from our teacher that they were planning this for you, I was only too happy to accept a role.”

Since I started my classes, I had stopped going to the library as often, which had been the only place where Liz and I saw one another. We never really

planned to meet up or anything, either. We were always just bumping into each other there.

“I’m sorry I haven’t dropped by,” I said.

“I understand you’ve been terribly busy. You couldn’t help it, could you?”

“Not really. Oh, is anyone else coming today?”

“It’s just the two of us. We can chat as much as we like.”

Thus began our tea party. Since it was an assignment, I was mindful of my manners the whole time.

The tea smelled vaguely of Darjeeling. All of the teas at the palace had been delicious, but this was the first time I had tasted one like this in this world.

When I complimented the blend, Liz smiled. “I’m glad to hear you like it. It comes from a farm contracted by my family.”

“I see.”

What else could I expect from the family of a marquis? I bet the farm was entirely monopolized by House Ashley.

The tea wasn’t the only gift to the palate. There were dozens of sweets, all pleasing to the eye and specially prepared by Liz for today. They were a bit too sugary for me, but I suspected that was just characteristic of the sweets here. They were, admittedly, perfect when I drank my tea black.

I had the feeling some of this effort was recompense for the amount of time I was spending on this assignment.

“Of course, I went all out. It’s our very first tea together, after all,” Liz said with a smile when I conveyed those thoughts to her.

I had been thoroughly prepared for this to be a perfectly ordinary tea, but Liz went out of her way to make it a special event for us. She didn’t know what I liked, so the spread was composed of her favorites.

Though she was a teenager, in the future I had a feeling she’d be a stunning beauty. She always wore elegant dresses in striking colors. However, from the sweets before us, it seemed she preferred sweet and adorable things. All of the

cookies with berries had a pink hue and were decorated cutely.

When I pointed that out, Liz nodded sheepishly. She said when it came to selecting her wardrobe, she focused on what complemented her the most, but that wasn't exactly in line with her real preferences. Since it was just the two of us today, she went ahead and leaned into the adorable factor.

As we chatted, the topic soon turned to recent events.

"I overheard some people talking about the Saint recently," Liz began.

I nearly choked on my tea. "The Saint?"

"Yes. I heard she can use all manner of incredible Healing spells and that she saved a great number of the knights."

"Uh, oh, is that so?"

"And that she was even able to restore limbs lost during the expedition. The knights she healed are truly grateful to her."

"Gosh."

"To be able to restore limbs like that makes her Healing Magic truly one of a kind, you know. But she isn't the least bit boastful—I hear she's terribly humble, even though I also heard the knights now worship her like a goddess."

That made me want to clutch my head and groan.

By "worship," she was likely referring to the Knights of the Second Order. I wanted to believe that the guys from the Third Order weren't that crazy.

As I listened, I tried to play innocent and pretend she wasn't talking about me, but I knew she wouldn't let me get away with that.

"I had no idea you were so skilled in Healing Magic, Sei." She smiled knowingly at me, and I knew I had no choice but to tell her the truth.

"Uh, yup, that's right."

Before this, we had never really talked much about ourselves. Mostly, that was because we hadn't needed to, so...I realized it might be nice to finally do so.

"I only just became able to use magic," I admitted.

“Really?”

“You see, I never needed to use it before.”

Liz looked at me with an odd smile on her face. What was that about? “And here I thought it was because the world you came from didn’t have magic, so you weren’t familiar with its usage.”

“H-huh?”

“You were summoned here, were you not?”

My eyes widened in surprise. Only a very small number of people knew I had been summoned to Salutania. Of course, I didn’t go telling anyone that, since blabbing about it was as good as telling people I was the Saint. As you likely have surmised by now: I didn’t want that.

So, the only people who knew were the ones who had been told by officials in the palace. Johan and Albert aside, I suspected all of the knights and mages knew. My maids probably did as well. I had never told anyone at the research institute, but I was pretty sure some had the sense I was the Saint and some had no idea. At least, that’s what I gleaned from people’s reactions to me.

The difference was probably defined by those individuals the officials thought should know and those the officials thought shouldn’t.

The Orders of Knights and Royal Magi Assembly were in charge of national defense, so of course they had to be informed. The maids had been assembled to care for the Saint after she was summoned, so they had to be in the loop, too.

On the flip side, though, I didn’t think Liz counted in any of these broad categories. Hence my surprise.

“You knew?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Since when?”

“Since the very beginning.”

“When we met in the library?”

“Yes, quite. But it was a coincidence that we met in the first place.”

Apparently, Liz had known about the ritual but had only guessed I was one of the summoned women from the black color of my eyes and my hair. That was a rare combination in this land, after all.

She had become sure of it after she talked to me, especially because I had been reading books in different languages—and yet I couldn’t explain any of the grammatical constructs to her at all.

Holy heck she was clever.

“It was the same for the other girl as well,” she said.

“Really?”

She was talking about Aira. I had almost forgotten, but Liz attended the Royal Academy as well. They might even be in the same class.

“I hear she can also read both our modern and classical languages, but she couldn’t tell us anything about the grammar,” Liz said.

“I see. Um, are you and Aira classmates?”

“No, she’s a year higher than I am.”

“Huh.”

“I see you know of her, then.”

“Only a bit.”

Since the beginning, I had learned things here and there from maids and officials. As we had been summoned together, I was interested to know how Aira was holding up. We had never met since that day, but once in a while, I got a bit worried about her.

“Is she all right?”

“I suppose. I’ve not heard of her taking ill or any such thing,” Liz answered a bit tentatively.

I gave her a puzzled frown and she looked disconcerted.

“Did something happen?” I asked.

“Well, um,” Liz raised her hand. As she did, the maids left like an outgoing tide.

Hoo boy. Whatever this was about, it was...a lot.

Liz checked to make sure the maids were gone before beginning her tale. “Do you remember when I told you about the classmate who was causing problems at my school?”

“Uh...” I vaguely recalled her telling me something like that a while ago. Something about a girl who was popular with all the guys and had them waiting on her hand and foot. Maybe that was who she meant? “Wait, don’t tell me that troublemaker you were talking about was Aira?”

Liz nodded sorrowfully. My gaze panned up toward the sky. Uh oh.

“I referred to her obliquely at the time, but I was indeed talking of Aira,” she confirmed.

“I see.” Well, it wasn’t like she had needed to go into much more detail for me to get the picture.

“I’ve really tried to address the situation, but nothing’s come of it,” Liz said.

“You mean how close she is to all those guys who already have fiancées?”

“Indeed.”

“Oof...”

This conundrum really made me need to stare off into the distance.

Back in Japan, clinging to someone who was already engaged was sure to invite social backlash. That went even for those who were just dating. But overall, this kind of behavior was bound to be less of a problem in Japan than it was here. That was the case with a lot of behaviors I thought nothing of in the past. For example, flapping your skirt when it was hot or a woman showing her bare feet to a man—Liz had lectured me about both before.

Was that what was happening to Aira? Since she had no idea how to follow Salutania’s standards of acceptable behavior, she might just be talking to the guys like she would her friends back in Japan.

Wait a minute, didn't Liz and her friends admonish her?

"You guys have brought it up with her, right?" I asked to confirm.

"Not I, but I heard someone else did indeed try to advise her to redirect her energies."

"And yet she hasn't changed her behavior?"

"Has something occurred to you, Sei?"

I told her I had just been thinking about the different social rules and standards in our two countries and how Japan was far more relaxed—how it was possible Aira wasn't aware of her perceived transgressions.

"Just given how we generally socialize, she probably wouldn't get what you meant if you only told her that she shouldn't be friends with the guys," I said.

"I see."

"I only learned about these expectations once you taught me. Although, you never know, the guys who hang out with her might tell her soon, too."

"I doubt that," Liz said decisively with a stiff smile. She wasn't wearing a scary expression or anything, but the aura she gave off frightened me somewhat, sending a shiver run down my spine.

Uh, Liz? You okay?

"If there truly were such a gentleman in her midst, then this wouldn't be so large of a problem as it has become," she stated with a somewhat disgusted tone. It kind of scared me.

"Th-that's true," I said.

But why is she so angry? As I wondered that, I suddenly remembered what Mary told me: Liz had a fiancé.

"Wait, don't tell me your fiancé is among her admirers?" I asked tentatively.

"That is correct." The air around Liz seemed to grow all the darker. I really wanted to believe it was just my imagination.

"And your fiancé is *him*, right?"

“Indeed. Prince Kyle.”

All I could do was chuckle flatly. I should have realized.

“I hear he acted terribly toward you as well,” Liz continued.

“Yeah? I guess you could say that.” All I could do was laugh when I remembered the events of my summoning. *Yup. Terribly indeed.*

My laughter sounded forced. Liz straightened her posture and looked at me with a deadly serious expression. “I apologize on his behalf for what happened that day.”

“Huh? *You* don’t need to apologize for it.”

“But—”

“It’s okay. It’s really not your fault.”

She still looked discontent, so I smiled as I tried to convince her. I understood she felt an obligation as his fiancée, but I felt awful accepting any apologies for something she had nothing to do with.

“How about we put that aside and think of a way to solve this problem with Aira instead?” I said in an attempt to change the topic. I didn’t want to talk about the prince any more than we already had.

“Oh, Sei,” Liz murmured under her breath, clearly grasping my intentions, but she didn’t pursue the topic any further. I was grateful for her tact.

From there, we discussed Aira’s circumstances and how we might improve them. We came up with several ideas trying to find the right fit. Before we knew it, hours had passed. Somehow, we finally hit on an idea that sounded like it might bear fruit. I would leave the rest of the details to Liz.

With that, my very first tea party came to an end.

Behind the Scenes II

AT THE TIME, Aira Misono was a sixteen-year-old high schooler. An only child, she lived with her mother and father. Both of them worked, so Aira was often home alone.

One night, both her parents were under deadline at work, so yet again, Aira was home alone late at night. While reading a magazine in her room, she became thirsty and wanted to snack on something sweet, so she headed downstairs to the convenience store on the first floor of her apartment building.

She slipped her shoes on in the foyer, and just as she reached to open the door, white light spilled out under her feet. Aira closed her eyes against the brightness.

When she sensed the light had subsided, she slowly reopened her eyes and found herself in a room she had never seen before.

What the heck?

Moments before, she had been in her apartment, yet now she faced an unfamiliar sight. Surrounded by walls and floor made of stone, people wearing strange clothes cried out joyfully all around her.

Aira gaped. This looked like a scene out of some kind of movie.

One other person had been summoned like Aira, but Aira didn't notice her because this other woman sat on the ground at a diagonal angle behind her. Also, shocked beyond thought, Aira didn't think to look in that direction.

The fact that Aira failed to notice this other woman was her first crossroad.

A few moments later, she heard the door open. She reflexively looked in its direction to see three young men entering the room. They wore strange clothes, too, but they were all handsome enough to be Hollywood stars, which further convinced Aira she had stumbled into a movie.

The three young men swooped down on Aira, and the stately red-headed one

kneeled in front of her. He smiled as he spoke to her. “Are you the Saint?”



Aira perfectly understood Crown Prince Kyle Salutania of the Kingdom of Salutania's words. However, while she understood what he said, she didn't grasp its meaning. She could only gaze up at him silently. Kyle kept talking, but his words just went in one of her ears and out the other. Aira didn't comprehend a single thing he said.

The dark-blue-haired guy—Damian Goltz, Kyle's friend since childhood and the son of the current prime minister—noticed Aira acting strangely and whispered in Kyle's ear.

"Let's take her to another room in the meantime then," Kyle said. Then he took Aira's hand and stood.

With that, Aira followed Kyle and his entourage out of the room, down the long corridors of the palace, and at last to a sunny room. The walk calmed Aira down enough to let her start taking in her surroundings. She sat on a couch until she composed herself enough to have a conversation.

"Allow me to introduce myself again. My name is Kyle Salutania, and I am the crown prince of the Kingdom of Salutania. May I ask your name?"

"Misono Aira," she answered in a thin voice, but then realized she had said her family name first, like they did back in Japan, and given the European-style architecture surrounding her, that probably wasn't right. "Uh, Aira is my given name."

"I see. So name order differs in your land." Kyle's and his friends' smiles deepened. It gladdened them to see Aira finally speak. Kyle's first botched introduction had left them worried the summoning had affected her health.

"Uh, why am I here?" Aira asked. She could think of nothing else.

Somehow, she had opened a door to Europe instead of a convenience store. Though this was a metaphorical door, it sure felt like that was what had happened. The true answer bewildered her.

"We summoned you here using the Saint Summoning Ritual."

"The Saint?" Aira gave Kyle a quizzical look.

Damian, standing next to Kyle, then explained the meaning of the Saint and

the ritual to call her. Aira learned she had been summoned to another world to defeat monsters.

Summoned to another world.

Something that only happened in books and manga had actually happened to her. It didn't feel like it could be real, but hearing all this made Aira suddenly begin to wonder whether she could return to Japan. In those stories, some managed to return to their worlds once they completed their tasks.

"Um, so will I be able to go back home if I defeat all the monsters?" Aira asked, clinging to a tiny fragment of hope.

However, Damien answered as if adding a footnote to his previous explanation. "I don't believe so. I haven't heard of anything like that."

According to him, the last ritual had been performed in another age, and no records indicated the prior Saint had returned to her world.

"So...I *can't* go home?" Aira said slowly with a dazed expression.

Until that moment, Kyle had been elated by the successful Saint summoning, but now his expression grew perplexed. Kyle and his people rejoiced at the successful summoning; Aira would not and could not. Kyle didn't realize this until he saw a single tear fall from Aira's eye.

A month or so after the ritual, around when Aira had grown used to life in the Kingdom of Salutania, Kyle told her she would begin attending the Royal Academy.

The children of noble families all attended this academy, and Aira would be able to learn everything she needed to know as the Saint, from fundamental lay subjects to the use of magic.

Aira nodded without hesitation.

She had become dependent on Kyle. Ever since he saw her cry, he had taken extra good care of her. He felt guilty for separating her from her friends and family, and he wanted to atone for that sin. That single tear was all it took for him to feel compelled to protect her.

Kyle did everything he could think of to comfort Aira's heart even the littlest bit. He attended the academy and had official business to manage as well—though it wasn't all that much compared to the king—but he tried to be with Aira as much as possible. He lavished gifts upon her: the most fashionable dresses, accessories, and anything else she might need, as she had come to the kingdom with nothing. He even gave her cute-looking cakes and cookies.

Kyle's close associates similarly took turns waiting on Aira when Kyle wasn't available, eating the snacks they had brought while talking about the kingdom and the world Aira had come from. They took excellent care of her, and Aira depended on them all the more, especially since she had no one else to turn to.

Aira had been an only child, and her parents had given her everything. Her well-off family gave her toys, clothes, and more, whether she wanted them or not without much fuss. Her mother in particular had liked to dress Aira in adorable clothes.

On her days off, Aira's mother routinely dressed her in nice clothes for going out and then took her to different places. To her mother, Aira was a cute doll, and Aira never felt strange about it, since her mother had done this since her earliest memories. As long as she did as her mother said, she never had any problems.

Now that she had been summoned to another world and separated from her family, the way Kyle and his associates acted toward her reminded her of her family. Therefore, she grew accustomed to it and accepted everything Kyle gave her without question and did whatever he told her.

To Aira, that was what one ought to do.

Three months passed as Aira attended the Royal Academy at Crown Prince Kyle's recommendation. Her powers developed at a goodly pace.

She neither loved nor hated studying, but she had taken her classes seriously back in Japan as well and received exemplary grades. That attitude hadn't changed at the academy, where she studied the history of the Kingdom of Salutania, magic, and all manner of other subjects.

Since she joined after the school year was already underway, she took special supplementary classes as well, but with Kyle and his associates teaching her, she managed to keep up in all her studies.

Meanwhile, Aira's grades far exceeded those of the other students in subjects she had studied back in Japan, such as arithmetic and natural sciences. Her original world had been far more advanced in its knowledge of these subjects.

"Ah, I leveled up."

"Congrats. Try using this magic next."

After school, on the training grounds, Aira practiced casting magic with Mark Jahn, one of Kyle's close associates. As the eldest son of an earl and the most proficient at magic in Kyle's generation, Mark was widely expected to become a leading mage in the Royal Magi Assembly.

Before Aira started at the academy, it had been discovered she possessed skills in Holy Magic—just like Sei. All of the previous Saints had possessed Holy Magic as well, so on hearing of Aira's aptitude for it, Kyle nodded in satisfaction.

Thus, at Kyle's order, Aira began magic practice with the prince and his entourage after school every day without fail. Among the entourage, she paired up with Mark most often, due to his general expertise in the field. While he lacked an affinity with Holy Magic, he was skilled in Wind and Thunder Magic and widely read in the topic beyond his personal proficiencies.

Thanks to these lessons and extra practice sessions, Aira's Holy Magic Skills leveled up at an astounding rate. Some suspected her improvement was partly due to the generous supply of high-grade MP potions provided for her practice—with Kyle's support. Magic skills leveled up with use, and drinking potions allowed one to cast a greater number of spells by replenishing MP.

In actuality, since Aira had been summoned from another world, her base level and Skill levels improved at a far better than average rate compared to the people of this world. Sei leveled up rapidly as well, which was why her Production skills improved as quickly as they did, though no one had noticed this due to Sei's obsessive potion-making.

"Let's end it here for today," Mark said.

“Okay,” Aira said with a nod and put down her hands.

They had expended all of the MP potions they had brought that day, so practice ended at about the same time as it usually did.

Aira and Mark left the training grounds, meaning to return to the palace. As they walked down a hallway, Mark furrowed his brow. He had noticed something amiss at the entrance to the academy. “The carriage isn’t here.”

Normally, a carriage came for them from the palace, but today, they saw no sign of it. At Kyle’s orders, one of his close associates was to accompany Aira at all times for her protection, but today, only Mark was available. Therefore, Mark couldn’t just leave Aira to summon another carriage, so they both wound up simply waiting.

They soon grew tired of silence and began chatting. Usually, Mark and Aira only discussed Holy Magic when they practiced together, but now their discussion tracked to other types of magic. Other people might have found the topic difficult, but since Aira had studied natural sciences back in Japan, she had an analytical mind that allowed her to follow Mark’s thoughts. She also found him quite interesting.

They had a surprisingly nice afternoon together, but they didn’t notice someone watching them laughing and chatting from the shadows.

Aira had grown used to the academy by this point. One day, just as she was heading to the training grounds as usual, someone called out to her from behind.

“May I have a few moments of your time?”

Aira looked back to find a pretty girl with a somewhat cold demeanor. This particular girl had never spoken to Aira, but it wasn’t the first time one of the other girls had stopped her.

Early on, someone from Kyle’s entourage had always been by Aira’s side, but now that she had grown accustomed to daily life, in some rare moments, she was alone. During those times, girls from the school spoke to her, almost as if they had been watching and waiting for the chance.

Unfortunately, it seemed like every girl who talked to Aira had only the same things to say: stop following Prince Kyle and his noble friends around, stop trying to seduce someone else's fiancé, *etc.*

These demands always left Aira bewildered. She had never intended to follow anyone around, nor did she have any memory of seducing anyone. True, Kyle indulged and cared for her, and ignoring the fact that his close friends were just following their prince's orders, they treated her well, too. However, Aira was sure they only did so because they all felt bad about summoning her.

As for the demand for her to stay away from Kyle and his friends, Aira had no one else to rely on, so she simply couldn't obey.

"My name is Elizabeth Ashley," said the cold girl. "I am Prince Kyle's fiancée."

Aira reflexively frowned at the word "fiancée." This girl was surely here to scold her for the same things as all the others. She did recall hearing a bit about Kyle's fiancée, and she was certain this girl was the daughter of a marquis.

"I believe others have warned you about this in my stead, but it does not reflect favorably upon you to be so close to His Highness when he already has a fiancée," said Elizabeth.

There it was. It all made Aira want to sigh.

"If it would be all right with you—" Elizabeth began, but then an angry voice interrupted her.

"What are you doing to her?!"

The two girls turned toward the voice to find Kyle wearing a stern expression, accompanied by his friends.

"Elizabeth, what business could you possibly have with Aira?" Kyle continued in a rising voice.

Elizabeth, unfazed by Kyle's shouting, pinched her skirts and bowed gracefully to him. Meanwhile, Kyle strode over to Aira and blocked Elizabeth's path to her.



“I only wish to speak with her for a moment,” Elizabeth said.

“You want to *speak* with her?” Kyle’s expression remained stern.

“Indeed,” Elizabeth replied with an unruffled air. “Since Lady Aira always studies with Your Highness and your friends after school, I wanted to offer to help her with her studies as well.”

Her words took Aira by surprise. They hadn’t gotten that far in their conversation, but it very well could have been true that this was what Elizabeth had been about to say—before Kyle intervened.

“Your help is unnecessary. I am the one looking after Aira.”

“But, Your Highness...”

“I am the one entrusted with the care of the Saint. Now, is that all you wished to say?”

Elizabeth sunk into silence, helpless in the face of Kyle’s harsh attitude. As if to say this conversation was over, Kyle put a hand on Aira’s back and made to walk away from Elizabeth.

Just then, another voice piped up. “Ah, so this is where you were.”

Everyone turned toward the voice to find a young man with bright copper hair and close resemblance to Kyle walking toward them. It was Rayne Salutania, second prince of the Kingdom of Salutania. He had a soft aura and a gentle smile as he made his way over to Kyle. His very appearance eased the tension of the moment.

“I’ve been looking for you, Brother,” Rayne said.

“Why?” Kyle demanded.

“Professor Herzog wants to speak with you.”

“What about?”

“Something to do with the expedition into the eastern forest next week.”

“Ah.”

Kyle and the others planned to go monster slaying in the eastern forest the

following week in order to raise Aira's base level. However, at their base level, the eastern forest was inadequate for training, so their professors and the Orders of Knights who acted as their guards had proposed they head into the southern forest instead. Kyle had refused, fearful that something might happen to Aira. Therefore, his mood declined upon hearing Professor Herzog sounded likely to try and change his mind again.

However, while Kyle thought the professor's interference annoying, he possessed a serious character in spite of his attitude, and therefore headed toward Professor Herzog's office along with Aira and his friends.

Rayne and Elizabeth, having been left behind, glanced at one another and exchanged wry smiles.

"Bad timing, huh?" Rayne said.

"Indeed," Elizabeth replied.

Rayne and Elizabeth had known each other since childhood, and they were able to understand one another's thoughts with only a short exchange of words.

Rayne was referring to Kyle's sudden appearance while Elizabeth tried to talk to Aira. Rayne had a grim outlook on the situation; he didn't like Aira being so thoroughly corralled by Kyle. He had heard their classmates gossiping and had talked to Elizabeth to see if they could clear things up.

The fiancées of Kyle's friends had also pleaded with Elizabeth to do something about Aira. After discussing it amongst themselves, they had suggested Elizabeth should try to be the one to help Aira at school instead of Kyle and his friends.

When Elizabeth happened to run into Aira when she was alone, she tried to bring up the topic, but Kyle showed up before she could get to the important part, and she lost her chance.

Kyle treated Aira as the Saint, but Aira hadn't been the only person summoned in the ritual. There were no reports about the other potential Saint having the powers characteristic of the Saint, but Rayne had heard of her numerous achievements.

In fact, recently, a wave of rumors claimed the other woman was the real Saint. Sensing his older brother tipping toward a precarious situation by attaching too much importance to Aira alone, Rayne had made various propositions to his brother, but Kyle wouldn't budge on matters related to Aira.

That day, Rayne and Elizabeth each left the academy knowing the only way they'd be able to get in contact with Aira would be to watch and wait for the right opportunity.

When Aira got back to her room in the palace, she dismissed her maids and, alone in her room, flopped onto her bed. She felt far more mentally than physically exhausted.

Lately, Aira had been trying her hardest to stay close to Kyle and his friends in order to avoid having to talk to other girls, but she still found herself on her own once in a while. She hadn't been too surprised when Elizabeth approached her, but Aira couldn't shake the feeling that this girl was different from the others. They hadn't been able to have a full conversation after Kyle descended, but it sounded like Elizabeth wanted to help her out with her studies like Kyle and his friends did.

That was a first.

Since she had arrived in this world, Aira had only ever been with Kyle and his friends, so she didn't have a single friend who was a girl. Would she and Elizabeth have become friends if Kyle hadn't interrupted? Maybe Aira should have spoken up over Kyle's rejection and accepted Elizabeth's proposal.

Despite thinking it over, she couldn't convince herself to reach out.

It depressed Aira when the other girls said angry, accusatory things to her, but she could avoid having to hear any of it if she was careful—so long as she was with Kyle and the other boys, no girl dared talk to her.

Also, she didn't know if Elizabeth would be true to her word. Considering how the other girls had acted toward Aira until now, she couldn't just take Elizabeth at face value.

This was her second crossroad: choosing whether or not to take Elizabeth's

hand.

She couldn't decide! She distracted herself with thoughts of Professor Herzog.

The conversation had gone just as Kyle expected—Professor Herzog suggested they go level up in the southern forest instead. Due to Kyle unreasonably insisting on the eastern forest because Aira's level hadn't yet reached Kyle's, they decided against the southern forest, but Professor Herzog had been certain Aira would be fine so long as Kyle and the others were with her.

In all honesty, whenever Kyle made Aira's level the lynchpin for his decisions about where they would go level up, Aira felt like she was holding Kyle back, and it made her uncomfortable.

In order to quell that feeling, she was willing to give leveling up in the southern forest a shot, but seeing Kyle so obstinate about leveling up in the eastern forest robbed her of the courage to speak her mind.

"Stats." She cast one of the Practical Magic spells she had been taught and a translucent window appeared before her eyes.

Aira sighed as she looked at her level. From what Professor Herzog said, the southern forest was appropriate for people with Base Levels of 12 to 20. Aira's level was already well into that range. In fact, she had begun feeling she was leveling up more slowly. She should probably tell Kyle that she wanted to give going to the southern forest a try, right?

She wasn't sure what to do... But Kyle was. She would let Kyle decide what was best. He wouldn't hurt her.

She got out of the bed, and the window disappeared.

Act 4:

Herb Enhancement

I WENT TO THE LIBRARY for the first time in a while. It had been difficult to make it there since I started taking classes, but I finally managed it—and I headed over at full speed because I had finally received permission to enter the Forbidden Depository.

The Depository was attached to the library, but the break room for the librarians separated it from the public area. Plus, a massive door kept it locked away.

The key for that door struck me as odd in that it looked regular to me, but apparently it wasn't remotely mundane. I didn't really understand how it worked, but it utilized some mysterious magical technology such that even if you possessed the key, the door only opened to those granted permission to enter. It resembled biometric authentication, really.

Also, you didn't need to lock the door on your way out, as there was a kind of auto-lock system.

After I showed the librarian in the break room my permit, he opened the Depository door and guided me to the bookshelf I wanted to see. The library wasn't that popular of a place to begin with, but the Forbidden Depository was even more desolate. The only ones in there were the librarian and myself.

"The bookshelves containing the books related to herbology and botany are here and here."

I thanked the librarian, and he left, whereupon I immediately set about picking out books from the shelves.

As you might expect from a restricted library, the books were chained to their bookshelves, so they couldn't be taken out of the room. The chain reached to about the length of the nearest desk and chair, so I grabbed a few notable books and sat there.

The books in the Depository looked older than the ones in the regular library, making me a bit nervous to so much as turn their pages. I took special care while poring through them for the information I wanted: more potent herbs than the ones used in high-grade HP potions.

I had read pretty much every book in the regular library related to medicinal plants. These described herbs used in all manner of potions up to high-grade, but said nothing of anything potentially stronger. Therefore, I hoped I might find such research in the Forbidden Depository. My guess was correct.

The Depository books did indeed have some books detailing herbs I had never heard of before. And that wasn't all—these books were far more detailed about the herbs I was already acquainted with. I even found some potion recipes that inspired all sorts of new ideas—as for the effects of the original potions in these forbidden books? Well...it was probably better to pretend I hadn't seen them.

I became entirely absorbed in reading, devouring one book after the other until I was exhausted.

I guess I should take a break? I thought to myself and looked up, where I found someone standing right next me.

“Eek!” I jumped in surprise.

In the dim light, I saw the faint outline of a white porcelain mask—no, wait—face. It was Grand Magus Yuri, and I had no idea how long he'd been standing there.

At least, I was pretty sure it was him. He wore a blank expression as he gazed down at the book, and since he was so beautiful, his face looked more like a mask.

“Grand Magus?” I called.

He turned his gaze to me and slowly smiled. “Are you looking for information on herbs?”

“Uh, yes... How long have you been here for?”

“Oh, a little while. I was waiting to see how long it would take you to notice me.”

“You should have just said something.”

“You looked so fascinated, I could hardly interrupt.”

It was true that I had been pretty invested in my new research, but was I so entranced that I hadn’t even noticed him breathing down my neck? I didn’t even notice him coming into the room.

It was quite a shock, all in all. I clutched my chest, my heart still pounding. Yuri turned the pages of my book.

“Is there someone you want to kill?”

“What?” I stared at him in confusion. That was the last thing I expected to hear. *Why the heck would he say something like that?*

“All of these plants are poisonous, correct?”

I looked down at the page he was pointing at. ...Yup. He was right. Which meant this book contained nothing *but* poisonous plants.

H-hey, don’t they say that even poison can be beneficial depending on how you use it? I never intended to use them that way.

“Poison is only harmful in certain amounts—or with certain reactants,” I pointed out.

“Oh, that’s true.” He nodded, but I got the feeling he thought I was hiding something.

Really, I’m telling you the truth! Okay?

“So, what is it you’re looking for, then?”

“Uh, new medicinal plants. Ones I can use for variations on our current recovery potions.”

“So, herbs outside of normal usage?”

“More or less.”

Yuri seemed to find this intriguing, so I told him everything about my research and my hunt for more effective ingredients.

Yuri put his hand on his chin and sunk into thought with an, “I see.” After a

moment, he asked, “You make potions by boiling herbs and water while imbuing them with magic, correct?”

“That’s correct.”

“Did you know that plants contain a miniscule amount of magic?”

“Huh? They do?” That was the first time I had ever heard such a thing.

According to Yuri, all living things possessed some quantity of magic. Not many people knew this, though. He himself had only confirmed it through his own research. Based on this knowledge, he gave me the following advice: I should focus on the amount of magic in the herbs I used in order to strengthen my potions.

The general theory said that herbs were made more potent by the application of magic during potion production. That was why Yuri thought my magic, with its extra glowy gold element, made my potions more efficient than everyone else’s.

“If the herbs were imbued with your magic even prior to brewing, I bet they would become even stronger,” Yuri said.

“I’m able to do that?”

“Who knows.”

I wanted to faceplant on the desk. That was the most essential question, but even the grand magus didn’t know the answer. I had a feeling he might be onto something, though, and the question now was how to go about accomplishing this.

“I apologize for my ignorance. I know a great deal when it comes to magic and spells, but herbs aren’t quite my forte.”

“That’s all right. I think you helped me a lot. Thank you.”

Thanks to his advice, I felt a glimmer of hope.

I was at a good stopping point, so I left the Forbidden Depository and headed back to the institute. Since I had never heard about herbs being magical before, it was highly likely the other researchers didn’t know anything about this, either. But surely they were more knowledgeable on the topic than the grand

magus.

They say two heads are better than one, after all—and I'm going from two to a dozen.

I couldn't help feeling a bit excited as Yuri and I went our separate ways.

When I got back to the institute, I started interrogating the other researchers about magical plants. Some of my peers knew about herbs with magical properties, however, no one had ever thought about imbuing their own magic into non-magical ones. They were taken by surprise when I mentioned it.

After all, we'd had no reason to think imbuing our own magic into the herbs prior to production would have anything to do with potion efficiency. Therefore, nobody had any ideas on how to actually go about it.

Well, if they don't know, they don't know. Just means I'll have to run some experiments for myself.

"So, Jude, can you help me out?" I asked him.

"Getting right to it, huh? What do you need me to help you with?" Jude asked with a dry chuckle. He was such a nice person for agreeing so readily.

First, I wanted to see if we could make water with magic in it. By immersing cut flowers in dyed water, you can tint the hue of the petals. Therefore, I thought we might be able to do something similar with the herbs by immersing them in magically imbued water.

However, I didn't know how to make such water, so I had to ask Jude with his proficiency in Water Magic. Unfortunately, he had no idea. He gave it a good try, and we experimented with all sorts of things—more magic, different channeling, that kind of stuff—but all we got was normal water.

"It's a good theory, but wasn't making magical water bound to fail for you, since you can't use Water Magic in the first place?" Jude asked at the end of another failed experiment.

"I was going to figure that part out later," I admitted, earning me an exasperated look.

Jude was right about my shortcomings, but I'd thought it'd be a good first step. However, I gave up on my Water Magic-induced magical water and instead tried to create it like I might when enchanting stone foci. If it worked with stones, then it might work with water, right?

Unfortunately, that idea was also an utter failure. I didn't feel that same warm sensation I got when I enchanted something—rather, it felt, somehow, impossible.

"Still, that's an inventive notion," Jude said.

"You think so?"

"I've certainly never seen anyone attempt it before."

"Well, it's probably just that you don't know a use for enchanted water. If it were necessary, I'm sure someone would figure it out."

So I said, but the whole time I was thinking about the holy water found in games. If I remembered correctly, holy water was used to fend off undead monsters. In some games, when sprinkled, it kept monsters away for a time. How was holy water made again? Just by blessing it? That sounded familiar. But how did one go about blessing?

I picked up a beaker of distilled water and started nodding to myself.

"What's up?" Jude had a somewhat uneasy tone.

"I was just thinking about how to bless this."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you guys not have holy water in this world?"

"Holy water? Hmm, I don't think I've ever heard of that."

If it didn't exist, then maybe this was a moot point. I had the feeling I ought to double-check with the grand magus, since this seemed more related to magic than herbology.

I glanced outside and noticed the sun had already set and that it was steadily growing dark out. Some time had passed since Jude and I began our experiments.

I guess I'll have to wait until tomorrow.

With that, we brought our experimenting to a close for the day.

“You want to know about blessings?” Yuri asked the next day during my class on magic.

I had asked him hoping it was merely a type of Holy Magic I had yet to learn, but Yuri hadn't heard of it either.

In the hopes that holy water maybe went by a different name here, I began to explain my theory. When I mentioned the part about affecting undead monsters, I was pretty sure I didn't imagine the sparkle in his eye.

From there, class took off in that direction, and I wound up telling him about the way magic functioned in the video games of my old world.

“Blessings also tend to be able to make a person stronger as well,” I said.

“Is that so? It sounds like these blessings had numerous effects indeed.”

“Magic didn't actually exist, though—it was all made up.”

“But still, this is a truly curious concept. We have magic that can strengthen people, but nothing especially strong against undead monsters.”

“Does that mean you can't defeat them with magic, then?”

“That's not the case at all. We typically use Fire Magic and the like when facing their kind,” he said and then put his hand to his chin to ponder for a moment. Had he finally thought of something similar to blessings? “I wouldn't say it's ‘super effective’ against just the undead, but we do have magic that's particularly good at annihilating monsters generally.”

“Really?”

“However, I've only heard of it. I don't know many details.” His usual smile vanished, replaced with a grave look.

I swallowed the lump in my throat. If Yuri had only *heard* of this magic, it wasn't a normal variety of elemental power. The only non-elemental magic I could think of was Practical Magic, but given that was so simple and ubiquitous,

I doubted it was some kind of hidden power.

“What’s the magic called?” I asked.

“It doesn’t even have a name, I’m afraid. We only have records of the people capable of casting it.”

“You don’t mean...”

“It’s the magic used by the Saint.”

Ugh, I knew it. I had a feeling, you know? However, what was this about not having detailed records of the magic the Saint used? How were the Saints in later eras supposed to learn how to use that magic?

“You really have no records?” I asked.

“Indeed no. The only thing we know for sure is that it can defeat monsters at an extremely expedient rate. We know nothing about its effects, however.”

“Then how did past Saints learn how to use the magic?”

“I’m afraid we don’t know that either.”

Yeesh.

I got no information beyond that.

The next sunny morning, I was deep in thought as I watered my corner of the herb garden. I couldn’t stop thinking about the magic powers of the Saint that Yuri had mentioned the day before.

It seemed it would be difficult to make magical water at present, so I gave up for the time being. Maybe I dropped the ambition a bit too fast, but what I really needed to figure out how to do was imbue herbs with my magic, not make neat water.

Since plants contained water, I contemplated how changing the water used to feed them might change the nature of the water they held, but the question remained as to *how*...

I also couldn’t stop thinking about the magic Yuri had mentioned—the magic of the Saint that was so powerful against not just the undead but all monsters. I

had heard something similar from an official before, too. He had said this magic wasn't a blessing per se but a kind of purifying magic.

Purifying. Based on that word alone, I didn't nurse much hope that this magic would have the effect I wanted. But it was the only thing I had to go on for now.

So, I decided to give it a shot. However, I didn't know exactly how this magic worked.

Some books were written on the effects of these Saintly powers, but they contained only the briefest of descriptions that talked about how it could defeat monsters. Most of them detailed how it purified the miasma and thereby disrupted the miasma's connection with the monsters. Surely there was more to it, but the books didn't even give the Saint's unique magic a proper name.

How in the world was I supposed to use it with such little information?

I didn't know what reason these past writers might have had to go to such lengths to hide this information, but it didn't change the fact that it gave me a headache having so much nothing to go on.

Where do I even start trying?

I focused on my magic and released it into my surroundings—just into my corner of the garden, though. I didn't want to affect everyone else's beds, after all.

I gazed steadily at the herbs before me but saw no difference in them. Just pouring my magic into them wasn't going to cut it.

But maybe if I keep going, there'll be some kind effect eventually? I thought. I waited for a little while, but still there was no change. I was going to run out of magical power if I kept going, so I had to leave off.

"Area Heal!" I cried.

A magic circle appeared on the ground and a white mist with gold sparkles rose up from it.

When the mist dissipated, I crouched down to examine my herbs again and found...that they somehow seemed in better shape.

I guess that means Heal works on plants as well. But that's not the effect I

want. *I don't want them to just be healthier. I just can't figure it out.*

I sighed. Still crouching, I waited for my MP to recover.

I would often recover by drinking a potion, but HP and MP also recovered naturally on their own. Apparently, the special training I had done also affected the recovery speed of my MP, and I didn't doubt this to be true as I watched my Stats. My MP really did come back faster than it had before I started taking classes.

After my MP returned, I stood up and released my magic again. This time, I used every little bit of holy area-of-effect magic I had learned in class. I just kept hoping *something* might have the desired effect. However, my hopes were for naught yet again.

Refusing to be discouraged, I tried a few regular magic spells as well, but those didn't work, either, even though I had really thought a spell for curing poison or paralysis like *Purification* might work.

Disappointed, I looked up at the sky to find the sun had already risen quite a bit. It was about time for me to head to the palace for class.

I wrapped up my impromptu experiments and headed back into the institute to get ready to leave.

When classes ended for the day, it was already dark outside.

As was the character of the institute, some people were still around, though it was the normal time for everyone to be finished with their work. That didn't include me, though. I liked to return to my research after I got back from class. However, I was stuck, and because of that I was gazing thoughtfully at my experimental apparatuses when I heard someone call to me from behind.

"Still no change?"

I recognized that voice.

"That's right," I answered with a shrug, still staring at the apparatuses.

Johan moved to stand next to me. "It looked like you were casting magic in the garden this morning. Did that have something to do with this?"

“Oh, you saw me?” I chuckled.

“Hard not to when you were casting spells one after the other first thing in the morning.”

I was sure it would’ve been one thing if I had used Water or Earth Magic spells, since they would seem like they might have something to do with plants, but I must have really stood out throwing around all that Holy Magic in the middle of the garden.

I glanced out the corner of my eye to find Johan chuckling as well.

“Did you figure anything out?” he asked.

“Well, only that it seems magic can affect plants as well.”

“Oh?” Johan narrowed his eyes with interest.

I told him how my plants brightened when I cast *Heal* on them, despite not being able to check for sure since I couldn’t use Appraisal Magic.

Johan touched his chin and thought this over for a moment. “If Holy Magic can affect plants, then maybe other elements can as well.”

“What do you mean by ‘as well’?”

He then told me about how a number of Earth Magic spells affected plants and that they used it to grow valuable plants in the garden that would otherwise be difficult to cultivate. Johan was proficient in Earth Magic, so he had been doing just that with his magic ever since he started working at the research institute.

However, they only used Earth Magic and Water Magic on the institute’s herbs. After all, there weren’t many people skilled in Holy Magic, and those rare few were usually assigned to the Royal Magi Assembly or one of the Knightly Orders. As a result, I was the only person with an aptitude for Holy Magic at the institute and no one had ever noticed what kind of effects Holy Magic might have on plants.

After Johan told me all this, it was my turn to tell him what Grand Magus Yuri had said about how herbs had magic, and if I were able to get my magic into the herbs, I would most likely be able to make even stronger potions—so now I was

looking for a way to do that.

Johan listened attentively until the end. “And that’s why you were casting magic at sunrise?”

“Yes, though I was unable to yield real results.”

“I see.”

“I guess the only other thing I haven’t tried yet is the Saint’s magic.”

“The Saint’s?” Johan looked at me questioningly.

Perhaps it came as a bit surprise, since I had been avoiding admitting I was the Saint and here I was bringing it up myself. “The grand magus mentioned it before...”

At that, I also told Johan about holy water and the Saint’s powers.

“I see. The Saint’s magic, though...”

“Do you know anything about it?”

“No. I know what they say about the Saint, but nothing more than anyone would know.”

“Ah.”

“If Grand Magus Drewes doesn’t either, then it’s unlikely anyone at the palace does.”

I hadn’t had much hope Johan would hold some secret knowledge, but the fact he didn’t either meant I really was at square negative one.

Things just aren’t going like I hoped.

“Though you know, it might not be the kind of thing that can be properly communicated.” Johan’s nonchalant words brought me out of my reverie.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“The kind of magic we use, with its universal, consistent effects, is something we share, yes?”

“I suppose so.”

“That’s why we can give it names and leave behind magic textbooks and the

like to show anyone with the skill how to use it. However, perhaps the Saint's magic is different."

"Are you saying it might not have a name and so forth because its use and effect differs depending on who has it?"

"Something like that. What if it varies based on the caster? If it's not a shared sort of magic, then there's not much point in leaving instructions behind, right?"

"Hmm."

Could that really be true? Even if it were, it seemed like the kind of thing you'd want records of anyway. Maybe there was another reason why they hadn't committed the details to writing.

No point in trying to figure that out, though. Right now, I should think about what the Saint's powers actually are.

Johan was right in that it had no name. The books referred to it as "the Saint's magic," but that didn't sound like any of the other names for magic in this world.

What about the effects of the magic? The literature makes it sound like all Saints have the power to annihilate monsters. But do our powers have any other effects? I sure hope they do, because otherwise I'm never going to be able to imbue plants with my magic.

But the absence of any details meant there was a high probability its only use was monster killing. However, I was still high and dry on the count of how to use this power, which was what I really wanted to know—as once I figured it out, I could do some real experimenting. However, not a word had been left behind on this topic.

I kind of doubted anything would come of just chanting "Saint's Magic" or something...

"I just want to know how it *works*," I said.

"I wouldn't know. That's more a question for Grand Magus Drewes."

"Hmm. I feel like all I do is ask him questions these days."

I had asked him all kinds of things during my last class, and I was sure he'd be annoyed if I kept asking him things that had nothing to do with his lectures. Although, since this had to do with magic, he might very well gleefully help me try to solve this mystery.

I'll try to puzzle this out for myself a bit longer before I bother him.

I told Johan I was going to go take a break and take a walk outside the institute. I had been cooped up inside all day, so I thought my head might be running in circles because of it. Getting some fresh air might help me work up new ideas.

I went outside with a lantern in hand. The wind stirred softly. Although it was still hot during the daytime, the breeze at night brought the temperature down quite a bit.

I sat on the bench just outside the institute and looked up at the sky, where I could see the moon and stars. This world didn't have two moons or a different-colored moon like those in the books I had read long ago. If I had to name a real difference between this world's sky and Japan's, it would be that there were so many more stars in this one, though that was probably because there were relatively fewer lights on the ground.

The first time I saw this starry sky, I was verklempt. That had been about a month after my summoning. For that first month, I just hadn't had it in me to take a minute and look up. I had been far too restless, what with having been suddenly summoned to another world. Not to mention, I was still reeling from being utterly ignored and abandoned by the crown prince. And then that official told me I couldn't ever return to Japan. Just remembering it all made me feel a bit upset again.

After that initial kerfuffle, I decided to find a way to live a normal life in this world. Firstly, with the crown prince being who he was, I had no idea when he would kick me out of the palace. Plus, I didn't want to stay there forever. In the end, I wound up employed at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora and had stayed there ever since. It was shortly after I moved there that I felt at ease enough to idly look up at the sky from my bedroom window.

Several months had passed since then. Recently, I'd stopped thinking about Japan quite so much. At first, I was sad at the thought of never getting to see my parents, my brothers, or my friends ever again. Even now my heart hurt a bit to remember them.

And yet... Maybe I was an adaptable person? Or maybe I'd become so fixated on all of the unusual characteristics of another world... But it felt like that pain was gradually fading.

Am I heartless to feel this way after only a few months? I might have felt differently if I had experienced nothing but misfortunes since my arrival, but that wasn't the case at all.

Excluding the prince, I had met so many kind people: Jude, Johan, and the other researchers, of course, and then others such as Knight Commander Albert and his Knights of the Third Order. Being surrounded by so many caring, welcoming people, I felt like I had found a place where I belonged.

Maybe that was why, despite running away from it for so long, I was finally coming to terms with my true role here as their Saint.

I mean, I couldn't just sit here not doing anything while everyone I knew was in danger, especially not after witnessing it with my own eyes. That was why I was researching potion improvement. It made me happy to be able to help them.

Suddenly, I remembered the time I was summoned to Albert's office so that he could thank me.

I guess it's because I'm reminiscing about all the things that happened when I first got here?

I didn't particularly expect or want him to thank me personally, but it was nice that he had done so, all the same. Remembering it made my heart tingle with warmth.

.....

.....

...

Huh? I gently pressed a hand to my heart. I called the feeling “warmth,” but that was just an expression—it wasn’t like my heart was actually warming up or anything. Yet, for some reason, it actually did feel warm right now. *What the heck?*

Even while I was worrying, my chest felt warmer and warmer until it reached the point where it felt like the heat would flow out of me.

What the heck is going on?! I was incredibly confused. And then I witnessed with my own eyes as something welled up from inside of me and suddenly, actually, began to overflow.

A mist spread out from me, just like when I cast an area-of-effect magic spell. It was white with gold sparkles, which made it likely that this was indeed my magic, but there were waaaay more sparkles than usual. In fact, I would say it was more a golden mist than the usual white.

What is this? The mist spread farther and farther. If I were casting a spell, it would’ve gone off by then. However, I didn’t think that was what would happen this time.

Suddenly, a nearby herb garden caught my eye. The mist had already reached it.

A thought popped into my mind: *Perhaps, right now I can...*

I wasn’t a Christian or anything, but for some reason I clasped my hands together as if in prayer. I had no idea why this pose seemed like the right thing to do, but it did. Then, I began to pray.

Please let this work.

The golden mist shone brightly, illuminating the whole lawn and garden despite the sun having already set. This lasted for but a moment before the light burst and golden sparkles began to rain down.

The wondrous sight made me sigh.



When I looked down, the herbs in the areas the mist had covered were now covered in golden sparkles. However, the twinkling disappeared right away.

“What happened?!” Johan must have noticed the light or something because he came bursting out of the institute. I couldn’t be too surprised.

“Uhhh,” I smiled awkwardly with a sheepish chuckle.

Johan furrowed his brow at me.

How in the world do I explain this? I don’t even know how I made it happen in the first place.

As I struggled to summon an answer, Johan’s gaze dropped to the herbs by my feet. He crouched down with a suspicious look on his face to examine them. He picked one for inspection and then searched the herbs growing near it, until he selected another where the mist hadn’t reached.

After comparing the two herbs in his hand, he looked up at me again. “What the heck?”

“I’m not really sure how to explain...” I trailed off.

Since it was dark, I didn’t see any difference between the two herbs, but Johan clearly did. I stammered through an explanation of everything that had happened since the moment I stepped outside. As I finished, he sighed.

“Well, let’s just get inside for now,” Johan said wearily and then turned to head back into the institute.

I’m so sorry I’m always acting the second an idea pops into my mind. I mentally apologized as I followed him inside.

“Did they change somehow?” I asked.

“Not on the outside, but...” Johan wasn’t entirely confident, so he hesitated a bit as he explained.

The two herbs on the table in the institute looked the same at a glance. But upon closer inspection, there was something different about them—on the inside.

On the inside? Does he mean the magic within them? I wasn't sure, but I would certainly ask him for the details later. Right now, I was more concerned about the outcome of the supposed changes.

"Try making potions with these," Johan suggested.

At his permission, I gathered my ingredients and cautiously set about making two separate potions. As I went, I too felt the difference at the stage where I had to imbue the brews with magic. It was only a...hm, a feeling, but there was definitely something different.

In fact, when the potions were finished, the difference between the two was obvious at a glance.

"It's so pretty," I breathed.

"It is..."

I could really see the difference as I held the bottled potion above my head toward the lamplight. It had golden sparkles floating in it, which reflected the light. This had never happened in any of the potions I made before.

"I wonder what its properties are."

"We'll have to test it to find out, but I'm guessing it'll be better than any we've made before." Johan wore a tired smile on his face.

Please don't look at me like that. I can't help it, okay?

The next day, we analyzed the potion and found that it was indeed better than anything I'd ever made before. It was plainly fifty percent more effective than fifty percent—just over twice as effective in all. *To think my curse would affect this, too...*

Upon further investigation, other people were also able to make potions one and a half times more effective by using the herbs that had been enhanced by my mysterious magic. We also discerned that the effects of the enhanced herbs lasted only for that generation—we couldn't use them to grow enhanced species of the same plants.

It seemed the only way to make enhanced herbs was with my magic. It was

nice and all that everyone could make better potions with these herbs, but it was a bit unfortunate that they wouldn't be able to get the ingredients without me.

There was also the problem that I had no idea how to cast that mysterious spell again. I tried it over and over, to no avail. I didn't know what had sparked it in the first place, so I really had no idea where to start, despite remembering what I did when it happened and trying that over and over again. *I guess I just need to figure it out step by step.*

I was sure the grand magus would joyfully accept an invitation to help me out with my research, though, so I didn't think it would be too long before I was able to cast it again.

Act 5:

Expedition

NINE MONTHS HAD PASSED since my summoning. Over the past few days, I had started working on making potions in the research institute after class until late into the night. I had received orders for potions from not only my usual client, the Knights of the Third Order, but the Knights of the Second Order as well.

It wasn't that big of a deal, though, since they only needed the usual number, which I could do easily so long as I had enough ingredients. I had always been able to make more potions than even those who specialized in the craft.

My absurd base level came with a ton of MP, and I could make a truly wild number of potions a day. My Stats probably explained this, but I had never shared those with anyone, and I wasn't about to until someone irrefutably figured me out.

My magic training paid off in this regard as well. I could make potions even more efficiently than before. I had known the training would help me cast faster, but I hadn't thought it would even affect my potion production rate.

Does this mean channeling affects pretty much everything about magic? I guess I shouldn't be surprised—the grand magus considered it so important, after all.

As I diligently brewed my potions, Johan came over. It was getting to be pretty late, and it was unusual for him to still be here at this hour.

Did something happen?

"Working hard, I see," he said.

"Thank you. I have to—there's so many this time."

"Because the Knights of the Second Order need potions as well?"

"Yeah. I wonder if they're going to keep ordering from us."

"They just might, considering how surprised they were by the batch we sent

during their last expedition to the western forest.”

“Were they?”

“Of course. Though, I guess I shouldn’t say ‘we’ since everything they got was one of *your* potions.”

Because of my fifty-percent-bonus curse, I thought. But if they do keep ordering from us, that means more revenue for the institute. Maybe I’ll ask for extra experimental materials—there’s that one rare plant I’ve been wanting...

I had held off on buying it since it was a bit expensive, but I had a feeling we might have the budget for it now.

Johan had started the conversation all casual, but a somewhat tense air lingered, so I suspected he wanted to discuss something else as well. I had a feeling I knew exactly what, too.

“A messenger came from the palace today. They requested support during the next expedition, help with healing, specifically.”

“They want your support?”

“Don’t play dumb. They want you.”

Yup, I was right. So right that I couldn’t help making that joke. “I see. I understand.”

Johan paused. “You’re sure unruffled.”

“Well, we discussed it before.”

“I suppose I expected you to be a bit more upset.”

I returned his wry smile with one of my own. I knew this request would come eventually. Both Johan and Yuri had said so. In fact, just a few days ago, Yuri had said, “You might be about ready for the western forest.”

I was unsure about how I actually *felt*, granted. Going on an expedition meant running into monsters. While I had visited some of the forests before, we hadn’t actually seen any of the beasts, so I didn’t know what to expect, not really.

I had borne witness to the grievous injuries of the knights who returned from the western forest—I knew it was dangerous. Now they wanted me to go there.

Of course that scared me. But I would likely be with the Knights of the Third Order, who had already protected my fellow researchers and me when we ventured out together before.

While my group hadn't run into any monsters during that excursion into the forest, the other groups had. The researchers had helped with the fighting, but I heard the knights had acted swiftly to ensure that none of them were injured.

I didn't think this time would be any different. I knew the knights were all good people, too. I doubted they expected me to face one of these monsters when all I had on my side was Holy Magic, which meant I had no way to fight back.

Therefore, even though I was scared, I wasn't pessimistic. Not to mention, I was far from opposed to providing support to the knights I knew so well. In fact, I looked forward to this opportunity to help.

Also, I was sure Yuri couldn't wait to go to the western forest. He wanted to see what effect my magic would have on the miasma, and his eyes shone when he talked about my potential journey there. Yuri sure was true to himself.

He wasn't the only one looking forward to this—the assignment interested me, too, even if the primary purpose was for an expedition. My reason? Herbs, as usual. Within that forest grew a number of medicinal plants we couldn't grow in any of our gardens.

When I had visited the other forests, I found all kinds of herbs and so forth, and they had varied between the two regions. Therefore, I hoped the western forest would have herbs that couldn't be found in either of the other two.

However, the monsters in the western forest were supposed to be stronger as well, so I didn't know if I'd have time to harvest. I would be the only researcher this time, while the ones who knew the most about herb collecting would remain behind. Though a bunch of us joined the knights on an expedition a few months back, that had been an exception.

As a result, the possibility of me noticing a new kind of plant on the trip was decidedly low. *Although I'll probably spot some familiar species... I guess I'll have to study up before we head there.*

“You look like you’re actually more excited about this than anything,” Johan said.

“Huh? I do?”

Johan’s wry smile changed into an exasperated one. “I bet you’re thinking about all the new plants you might be able to find, aren’t you?”

My herb mania always showed through in the end. “Is it that obvious?”

“I’m glad you’re so passionate and all, but be sure to make some potions for yourself.”

“Why?”

“Because you’ll need some right? MP potions and the like.”

“Now that you mention it, I suppose you’re right.”

While HP and MP recovered naturally, downing potions was a much faster way to go about filling the tank, so to speak. In an emergency, I probably wouldn’t have time to just sit around waiting for my MP to well back up. *Okay, then. I’ve reached my quota for the day, so I guess I’ll make some potions for myself, too.*

And so, I kept on making potions long after Johan left.

Autumn had come to Salutania, and the sun rose pretty late now. I didn’t have an alarm clock, but the fact that I could still wake early and naturally on my own meant I had grown accustomed to the rhythm of this world.

That wasn’t the only reason for my pre-sunrise up-and-at-’em, though. My heart raced all night, leaving me unable to sleep. I jittered like a kid the night before a field trip. However, unlike a kid, some of that anticipation came from anxiety.

Today, we set out for the western forest.

I fell out of bed and brushed my teeth. As I brushed, I walked myself through the plans for the day and gradually wrangled my mind.

I washed and moisturized my face, as was my routine, although I supposed I

wouldn't be able to take time for such things during the expedition. I did stash my cosmetics in small bottles in my travel bag, just in case.

Finally, I got dressed. For the expedition, I traded my usual clothing for the kind of robes mages of the Royal Magi Assembly wore. Unlike a Lady's Day dress, I could throw it on myself. It was easy to move in and not the least bit restrictive, likely since they had to be battle-ready. It only made sense.

They gave me the robe a few days ago, and I was relieved it wasn't fancy like the one I wore during my audience with the king. Something so pretty would stick out like a beacon in the forest. Not to mention, I lived in fear of dirtying such lovely things, and it would've made me a basket case on an expedition.

I couldn't forget to do my hair. I usually left it down, but I put it up in the back with a hairclip so it wouldn't get in my way.

Once ready, I gathered my things for the trip and headed downstairs. It was too early for anyone to be working, but I heard people moving on the first floor—probably the researchers delivering potions to the Knights of the Third Order.

I stepped into a bit of a hectic atmosphere around the front door. I had delivered the potions the knights ordered the day before, but they had asked for even more when they learned I would be joining them. When I told them I didn't think I would be able to carry so many extra potions myself, they rounded up a wagon for me to bring the extras with.

"Morning, Sei," Jude said when I ran into him at the door.

"Morning. Were you assigned potion duty, too?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

I'd never seen Jude up so early before, so I worried he might be flagging. Usually, servants delivered our potions to the knights. Once in a while, a researcher might run a batch out to the barracks on a whim. I used to drop some off on my free days, but lately my schedule hadn't allowed it.

I had assumed servants would once again take charge of transporting the potions today, since it had to be done before the break of dawn.

But if Jude's here, he's the one bringing them, right?

“Hey, they’re not making you run deliveries, are they?” I asked him.

“Yup.”

“It wasn’t easy for you to drag yourself out here, huh? I really thought they’d let you sleep.”

“I guess I just kinda felt like it this morning,” he said tentatively.

I gave him a quizzical look, but he didn’t offer a clearer explanation. *Well, whatever.*

I didn’t pry, and instead I helped him load up the wagon. When we were done, it was just about time to go.

“Sei.”

“Johan?” First Jude, now Johan. This was getting weird. “What’s up?”

“Don’t ‘what’s up’ me. I’m here to see you off.”

“Huh?!” *That* was why he was up so early?

My gape of surprise was met with an incredibly exasperated look from not only Johan but Jude.

Huh? What? Did I do something wrong?

“Never mind. In any case, the expeditions can get a bit...chaotic. So take care of yourself, and be sure to come back safely.”

“Thank you.”

“And the second you think you’re in the least bit of danger—run away. Got it?” Johan said with an unusually stern expression.

I nodded reflexively. “O-okay.”

Then he patted me on the head, too. What the heck was with him today? It was time to go, though, so I didn’t have a chance to pester him before I had to get in the wagon.

“I’ll be back before you know it,” I said as Jude got the wagon moving.

I waved in their direction; Johan returned my wave in kind, as did a servant who had come out to help us load the last potions.

“He sure is making a big fuss about all this,” I said after a moment.

Jude smiled wryly, reminding me that he had shared Johan’s exasperated look. “Well, of course he is.”

“But why?”

“You’re going on an *expedition*. I went on one back when I was at the Academy, but it was to the eastern forest—and you’re going to the western one, right? It’s a dangerous place.”

So I had heard, but could it really be that much more hazardous than the eastern and southern forests? I did remember the salamander had come from the west, and I realized other monsters had to also lurk there. But, well, I had never encountered any monsters at all, so maybe it just didn’t feel real to me, or perhaps my mind just refused to consider the possibility.

If it really was such a perilous place, then I guess I could understand Johan’s behavior.

“Be careful, okay?” Jude said. Even he was worried about me.

“I will.”

“I’m serious. Don’t go wandering off on your own just because you spotted some interesting herbs.”

“I know, I know.” Unfortunately, considering how easily distracted I had been on my last expedition, all I could do was nod meekly and take his warning to heart.

When we arrived at the barracks of the knights a little later, I began to stiffen. The tension was palpable as the knights rushed about, making their final preparations.

Jude and I climbed down from the wagon and he spoke to one of the servants, who began ferrying the potions over to the knights’ caravan. I watched the servant go as Jude came back over to me. He wore the same grave expression Johan had.

He really must be concerned, I thought as he smoothly took my left hand and held it.

“Come back safe and sound,” he said as words of parting. It wasn’t a long speech or anything, but we had already talked some on the way.

“I will.”

Jude dropped his gaze to the ground for a second before showing me that usual carefree smile of his. Then he headed back to the institute. I watched him go and turned on my heel. It was time to find a certain someone.

After a bit of wandering, I spotted the person I sought coming toward me already.

“Sei,” Knight Commander Albert called.

“Good morning,” I greeted him.

“Morning.”

During my last meeting with the official, he confirmed I would be traveling with the Knights of the Third Order. I was glad, since I had trained with the Third Order and knew many of the knights personally. I would have been exhausted traveling with people I didn’t know very well. Considering what lay ahead, we needed to limit the potential for any kind of exhaustion as much as possible.

Later, I heard from the knights that the Second and Third Orders had quarreled a bit over who I would travel with. I didn’t doubt this to be true, given how strangely fervent the Second Order could get about me. To be honest, their attitude, uh, kind of unsettled me, so I was truly relieved the Knights of the Third Order had won.

Apparently, I had Grand Magus Yuri to thank for that turn of events. Also, Lord Smarty-Glasses was Albert’s older brother, so maybe brotherly backup had something to do with it, too?

“Will you ride in the carriage until we reach the forest?” Albert asked.

“That’s what I heard.”

“I see...”

The official had said as much, since the western forest was a ways from the palace. I feared it would be a bit boring to be stuck inside a carriage by myself, but I figured it might not be so bad if I napped. However, Albert’s expression

darkened. Did the idea of my lonely carriage ride bother him?

I got the answer to that riddle when we reached the carriage in question.

“Good morning, Lady Sei.”

“Huh? Grand Magus?”

To my surprise, we found Yuri standing right beside it. I was pretty certain I had heard the Royal Magi Assembly were departing from their own barracks.

“Good morning,” I greeted him when I recovered. “What brings you here, Yuri?”

“I thought I would accompany you.”

“Accompany me...in the carriage?”

“That’s right.” Yuri smiled with a nod—an expression diametrically opposed to the one Albert wore. “It will take some time to reach the forest, so I thought we might discuss magic along the way.”

“As in, have a class?”

“Exactly. I heard you were supposed to travel by yourself, and I thought you might grow bored.”

While this nixed by nap plan, it was nice of Yuri to offer me another lesson, especially since I was worried I would forget everything I had worked so hard to learn during the stress and chaos of the expedition.

“That’s very considerate of you,” I said.

“Don’t mention it. It’s about time to depart, yes?” Yuri’s smile curled further.

“Looks like it.”

Preparations were about finished. Several people were climbing atop their horses or ready on standby. At Albert and Yuri’s urging, we made our way to the carriage door. I was the first one in—out of decorum, I guessed. The door was high up, and as I grabbed on to the frame to climb in, someone held out their hand to me... Albert. I shyly thanked him as I used his sure and steady hand for support.

I guess I’ve gotten used to being escorted like this. Maybe it’s thanks to my

lessons on etiquette?

Yeah... I sure was getting good at making excuses for myself.

The carriage was a great deal larger than I had imagined, and blankets covered the cushioned seats. Some care had been taken to ensure my comfort, and I was grateful for it.

I sat in the back, and Yuri came in after me. He sat down beside me, but I didn't mind much, seeing as this carriage was so much bigger than the one I had shared with Albert when we went to the capital that one time. Thank goodness for that! I really wanted to avoid having to be in direct contact with a devastatingly beautiful guy the whole way.

The door to the carriage closed, and a few moments later, we were off. It would take us a whole day to reach the western forest. While Yuri lectured me, I made sure to ask about the forest as well.

It actually took more like a day and a half. We took breaks along the way, which I worried were for my sake. Traveling by carriage did take its toll, though it hadn't affected me much on my brief trip to the capital. Fortunately, Yuri suggested I periodically cast *Heal* along the way, which really helped.

Though the travel took a lot out of me physically, it had less impact mentally, outside of how physical discomfort can wear you down. Yuri played a big part in keeping me occupied. Our lesson along the way focused on the expedition, so it ended up more like a lecture on battle than magic.

Yuri taught me about my role in the fighting, though he said that for the most part, we would just be patrolling. Having grown up in peaceful Japan, I had absolutely no experience in battle, so overall the lesson was invaluable.

However, it lasted for only a few hours because during our second break, I casually told Yuri about the enhanced herbs. I wanted to thank him for the advice he had given me. Of course, the conversation naturally flowed in the direction of how I accomplished the enhancement, and I inevitably told him about the mysterious magic...

When I offhandedly said, "I cast some spell but don't really know what I did,"

the look in his eye changed immediately.

Uh oh, I thought, but it was too late.

If Albert, who was with us during one of our breaks outside the carriage, hadn't interceded, we would've been rooted to the spot forever. I was grateful for his gentle suggestion that we resume our discussion inside. It wouldn't have been great for me if others overheard our talk.

After that, we discussed the magic I had used on the herbs the rest of the way. Although, it was more like being interrogated than having a conversation. Yuri had no idea what I'd done, so he kept asking me all these questions. He wanted me to show him the magic, but when I confessed I hadn't successfully cast it since, he wilted. *No surprise there.*

However, I assured him I was practicing in hopes that I could enhance more herbs and that I would show him once I figured out how to do it again. That brightened him up a bit.

This was how we spent our time until we reached the first campsite, where we convened with the Knights of the Second Order and the Royal Magi Assembly. I had assumed we were an especially large group, but apparently we were traveling in the same numbers as the last expedition. All in all, a whole lot more people were involved than our trip to the southern forest.

I suppose the western forest really must be trouble if they've even brought people to ready the campsite. Comparatively, the southern forest was a day trip.

Because of all the people, the knights were accompanied by servants to wait on them. Thanks to these servants, I got to lounge about in the carriage until everything was ready. Although, I did help out with cooking at the request of the Knights of the Third Order. They knew how good the cooking at the institute was, so I couldn't say no. Actually, I preferred delicious food myself, so I didn't even hesitate.

As I cooked, I was pleasantly surprised to find herbs among the ingredients that had been brought. Jude or Johan's doing, perhaps? At any rate, I happily included them in my recipes.

It'll be obvious everyone's physical abilities have been enhanced tomorrow...

but there shouldn't be an obvious connection, since this is dinner and everyone's going to sleep after, right? I thought, so I didn't hesitate to put my all into the meal.

Dinner was a huge hit with the members of the Knights of the Third Order. Johan had warned me against cooking in public, but the Knights of the Third Order already knew what I could do, so it felt pointless to try and hide it from them now.

The next day, we set out for the western forest again, and we arrived a little past noon. We still hadn't eaten, so we stopped for a lunch break.

After hearing about the Third Order's delectable dinner the night prior, the Knights of the Second Order and the Royal Magi Assembly wanted me to cook for them, too. There was no way I could manage a meal for that many people on my own, so I supervised and had other people do a lot of the work. Since we were about to start the expedition, it would've been helpful if I had found a way to amplify everyone's abilities, but since Johan forbade me to do so, it was probably a good thing I didn't.

From the first bite, my recipes were a big hit with the Second Order and Royal Magi Assembly as well.

After lunch, we determined we would head into the forest for a survey while it was still light out. However, I was to stay behind, since they were just going to scout.

Being the novice I was, I followed their orders without question. However, since I had time to spare, I got permission to search for herbs growing at the edge of the forest. I didn't want to waste the opportunity after coming all the way here, after all.

Graciously, Albert offered to be my escort. Yuri, on the other hand, was only too happy to join the scouts. He said something about needing a warm-up.

On our third day after departing the palace, we finally entered the forest. Though it was the middle of the day, the density of trees in the western forest made it dim. The eastern and southern forests were far clearer, even maintained, likely due to the number of academy students who moved through them. The brightness of those forests made this one even darker.

We split up into several different groups. Mine consisted of some knights from the Third Order, Albert, and Yuri. Because the grand magus was with us, we had half the number of mages as the other groups. I'd thought our group wouldn't include Yuri at all, but he insisted, saying it wouldn't do if something were to happen to me.

I thought having both Albert and Yuri in my group made us excessively strong, but Yuri wouldn't budge on the matter. Also, I was pretty certain the real reason Yuri wanted to be in my group was for his research.

Albert surprised me more. As knight commander, he used his authority to stick with our group, even though normally he would have been more judicious and lent his strength to any group lagging in that area. In the end, he only changed our group's formation.

We're definitely overpowered.

I did soon get to see my first monster at around that point, but I didn't even have time to be scared before Yuri annihilated it with a cheerful hum. Even Albert chuckled as he slew a monster that leapt out at him from the side.

Yuri had said he hadn't gone on an expedition in a while, and he had a certain kid-in-a-candy-store sparkle in his eye, but he didn't seem at all out of practice. In fact, he was casting more powerful spells than I had seen at the training grounds one after the other. I knew he was strong, but I hadn't realized how true that was.

I suppose it only makes sense for someone of his rank to be so skilled, right? Speaking of, does that mean Albert's as powerful as he is? And I'm in a group with both of them? We really do have an outrageous team.

"Oops!" I had been trying to pay attention to my own two feet, but of course my toes caught on a root. I probably would have fallen if Albert, who was walking next to me, hadn't caught me.

"Are you okay?"

"Y-yes, thank you."

Not only was it hard to see our feet due to the lack of light, slippery fallen leaves littered the path. The absence of small trees led me to assume they had

been cut down in advance, but it was still hard to navigate—especially as we couldn't just watch our feet the whole time. It was a bit of a conundrum.

I straightened my posture and noticed Yuri had a hand to his chin and seemed to be lost in thought. *What's with him?*

"Is something the matter, Grand Magus?" I asked.

"Oh, no, it's just that I couldn't help but notice how there seem to be fewer monsters than before," he said.

Considering it was my first time here, I couldn't say for sure. I looked to Albert for confirmation, which he gave with a nod.

"Is it because of the last expedition?" I asked Albert.

"It could be, but it feels like there are even fewer than there should be," he replied.

Both of them had pensive looks as they thought this over. No answers would come from thinking alone, though, so Yuri started asking Albert questions while we walked.

"There *were* more last time, weren't there?" asked Yuri.

"Yes. I've been keeping count."

"And we haven't seen any weaklings either, have we? So far today, we've only encountered the middle tier."

"Now that you mention it... Yes, you're completely right."

Yuri glanced at me. Albert followed his gaze to me as well.

Huh? What? I tilted my head at them in confusion.

Yuri nodded as if he had come to a conclusion.

"Shall we keep going?" Albert asked.

"Yes, let's."

Hey, come on, don't leave me in the dark here!

I contemplated demanding an explanation, but I lost my chance as we immediately ran into another monster.

As we continued, the intervals between monster encounters lessened little by little. Just when I thought we had to be pretty deep in the forest, the people in front of me came to a stop.

I thought this odd, but Albert, who stood beside me as usual, explained. “From this point on, we encounter the strongest monsters, so we usually take a moment to prepare ourselves.”

“Ah, I see.”

A mage in our party cast Holy Magic spells to improve offensive and defensive capabilities.

I should help, too. I moved to a good location and prepared to cast an area-of-effect spell of my own. I released my magic into my surroundings with *Area Protection*, which was a spell for increasing defense against both physical and magical attacks.

The basic version of the spell was *Protection*, which could only be cast on one person. There were also *Physical Protection* and *Magical Protection* spells, too. However, Yuri had taught me the spell for casting both at once, since for me, it was easier to use. Not to mention, it cost less MP.

Apparently, casting any kind of *Protection* was considered tough, but I grasped it relatively quickly. I was sure my Holy Magic level “infinity” had something to do with it.

Actually, the first time I cast *Area Protection*, Yuri laughed so hard he nearly fell over. I thought it a bit rude, seeing as he was the one who taught me. I also wasn’t sure whether he laughed because I had cast a difficult area-of-effect spell or because of the astonished looks on the other mages’ faces, but I didn’t let it bother me. It was a real time-saver to cast it as an area-of-effect spell than do a bunch of smaller spells one at a time, after all.

With our defenses shored up, offense came next, which was where my work came to an end. Casting such a potent area-of-effect spell had taken a hefty chunk out of my MP, so I downed several mid-grade MP potions. The other mages followed suit. We could have waited for our magical power to naturally recover, but we were going to move soon. Once we finished our potions, the group set off.

Everyone looked far tenser than before as we headed for the deepest part of the forest. The other groups had taken different routes, but we shared a destination. I heard the closer we got, the stronger the monsters would be, and this soon proved true. We also ran into monsters more and more frequently.

Up until that point, the skirmishes had wrapped quickly, but the fights started taking longer as well. Also, where we had run into only one monster at a time, now we encountered packs. Once we finished off one pack, more monsters rushed at us in a ceaseless stream.

People got hurt. I had to start joining in to provide support with *Heal*. Thanks to Yuri's special training, I was able to cast with speed and efficiency on my very first expedition.

Albert and his knights protected me, so I managed to stay safely in the rear without getting injured myself, which I think helped me remain calm. However, I couldn't help the growing anxiety.

"They're really swarming now. Was it like this last time as well?" Yuri asked between skirmishes. He had a look in his eye like he had just uncovered something curious.

"Yes," Albert answered, already prepped for the next skirmish. "And it'll get worse the deeper we go."

"Huh." Yuri grinned, chuckling as he licked his lips.

I feel like some kind of forbidden switch got flipped on Yuri's personality.

The second I thought that, Yuri cast multiple spells in rapid succession, completely obliterating a wave of monsters that had been heading our way. I had never seen him cast spells at that speed.

So this is what it means to master your magic. I was stunned.

"Something must be happening farther in," Yuri mused.

"The Order came to the same conclusion, which is why we're going all the way into the depths this time," said Albert.

"I wonder what it could be."

Versus Yuri's high predatory expression, the mages now wore resigned looks.

They were clearly familiar with that lurking forbidden switch. Really, Yuri looked just like he did whenever we discussed my magic. One of the mages muttered that there was no stopping the grand magus now. I saw what they meant and felt it in my bones, and I followed after them in silence.

We headed ever deeper into the forest, all the while slaying every monster we saw.

“Reflection.”

I lost count of our battles as I cast the barrier spell that caused monster attacks to reflect back and damage them instead. The knights used these opportunities to strike back as the monsters flinched. I cast this one at just the right moment.

“Nice timing,” Yuri said as I was feeling proud of myself.

“Thank you.” His words of praise really did feel sweet.

However, that feeling only lasted for an instant, since we were on the move again. We couldn’t ever stay in place for long, or the monsters would gang up on us if given half the chance.

Perhaps because we were nearing the heart of the forest, the downtime between battles was basically nonexistent. Somehow, the air grew stale as well. An awful sweat trailed down my back, and my clothes stuck to me. According to Albert, this uncomfortable feeling was due to the density of the miasma.

So this is the miasma. I did hear it condenses in the depths of forests.

Just as we arrived at the very center of the western forest, the knights spearheading our group began to murmur in confusion. Albert and Yuri headed toward the front of the group, and I followed a step behind them.

The place considered to be the heart of the forest was now a kind of crater. We stood at the top and gazed down into its depths, where something like a black swamp seethed. Monsters crawled out of it one after the other.

Albert and Yuri peered grimly into the swamp. Due to the distance, the monsters had yet to notice us, so they spoke to one another in hushed tones.

“What the hell is that?” Albert asked.

“Good question,” Yuri said.

I tried to breathe as quietly as I could as I gazed at the swamp from behind the two men. It looked like the monsters didn’t move away immediately—they lingered at the perimeter of the swamp for some time. There were so many that they crowded the edge. If a single one of them noticed us, the rest of the pack would instantly follow their gaze.

I really hoped that wouldn’t happen. No matter how strong Albert and Yuri were, surely they couldn’t take on so many beasts. I couldn’t help but tremble at the very thought. *Yup, there’s no way we’d get out of here alive.*

The longer I stared at the swamp, though, the weirder it seemed. Just looking at its pitch-blackness filled me with uncanny dread. Between its unnatural color and the monsters writhing out of it, there was absolutely nothing *normal* about this swamp.

Even worse, it seemed like this was the first time my companions were seeing it. They didn’t seem to know what to make of the dreadful thing, either.

The miasma’s supposed to condense closer to the heart of the forest, so...does that mean this swamp might actually be the miasma itself?

Albert and Yuri turned then, silently signaling their men to stand down. Some of the monstrous horde had started in our direction. I tried my best not to make any noise as I followed the command as well.

Then a scream erupted from the direction we were heading. I strained my eyes through the dark and caught a faint orange light.

What in the world? The second I thought that, the light blazed into searing flame, swallowing up all the knights in front of us. *Oh no!*

“They’re coming!” Albert screamed from behind me.

I was petrified.

I turned to see a wave of the monsters that had clustered by the swamp charging up the slope toward us. Had they heard the commotion? A chill shot down my spine.

“It appears to be a salamander,” Yuri murmured. I hadn’t noticed him come

over to me.

“What?”

So that horrifying blaze was the flame of a salamander.

Up ahead, white light flared as a mage cast Healing Magic. Yuri had started casting spells to attack the monsters coming at us from the rear.

Right. I can't just stand around doing nothing. I glanced up front and saw a mage racing toward the people who had been consumed by the flames. A magical barrier had shielded the victims, so they were singed—some worse—but alive.

I frantically began casting *Heal* as well, channeling the same amount of magic I used when regrowing lost limbs. From the cry of joy that followed, I knew I'd made the right call. I spread my attention to cast *Heal* on other knights as well, and I didn't forget to give aid to the rearguard, either.

Since the rear was now the front, the front was mainly composed of mages. As a result, few mages remained to heal those in the new rear, which faced the wave of freshly spawned monsters. Yuri cast recovery spells between offensive ones, but I realized it would be far more efficient if I took over recovery wholesale.

For some time, we were trapped in a deadly stalemate. The front struggled to fend off the salamander. Meanwhile, Albert, Yuri, and the other knights in the rear slew monster after monster scrabbling toward us with their various combat proficiencies. However, the swamp just kept belching up more ferocious creatures—it never ended.

I didn't need to fear running out of MP so long as I had potions on hand, but things would turn dire when my supply ran out. The glimmer of desperation grew in my companions' eyes. Yuri always spoke so politely, but now I heard even him curse—proof he was being pushed to his limits.

My stomach suddenly hurt, and sharply.

Just then, I heard someone shout, “Watch out!” from behind. I turned back to see a fireball from the salamander hurtling my way.

Whoa, wait a minute! I didn't have time to cast a barrier spell, and Yuri was so busy protecting the rear that he didn't have time to help me, either.

From far, far away, I heard Albert scream my name.

Everything seemed to slow, like I was watching a revolving lantern. In the next instant, a chill took the air as a towering wall of ice shot up over me from behind.

I had thrown up my hands to cover my face, but the ice wall blocked the fireball, which exploded against it. Steam from the ice drifted in the air around me.

Strength drained from my limbs. Yuri caught me by the arm before I could collapse on the spot. "We're not done yet. Keep your legs steady."

"I-I'll try."

"That must have been the magic in your hairclip."

"My hairclip?"

"Why, the enchanted one you're wearing, of course."

I had completely forgotten. The hairclip keeping the hair out of my face had been given to me by Albert, and it was indeed enchanted.

So that protection spell was what it was enchanted with... It's thanks to Albert that I'm still standing.

My heart warmed, and I clenched a hand to my chest. I somehow managed to stand straight on my own, and judging I was okay to stay up, Yuri let go of me to leap back into the fray.

The situation was still highly unpredictable, with no end to the monsters in sight. Something had to be done about that swamp, or they wouldn't ever let up.

Someone might die.

That fireball never would have reached me if the knights had been aware enough to block it. Although we could heal ourselves physically, we couldn't treat our mental fatigue. Everyone was losing focus and getting hurt more

frequently, and more terribly.

What can I do? Are healing spells my only option? Those thoughts raced through my head as I kept casting. *I want to do something about that swamp. I have to...*

“Knight commander!” One of the knights cried out, seizing my thoughts.

I whipped around in their direction to find Albert staggering back from a vicious confrontation with a demonic black wolf. Albert managed to kill it, but another black wolf lunged toward him.

No, stop!

The next thing I knew, something flowed out from within me—the same golden magic I had seen before at the institute. In an instant, the shimmering gold torrent of magic reached Albert, and when it swallowed the black wolf, the monster evaporated into black smoke.



Albert stared back at me in open astonishment. And not just him—several others did as well.

Granted, I was pretty surprised myself.

What was that just now? Whatever I did, it was ridiculously powerful.

The golden magic flowing from me didn't stop, despite my surprise. Indeed, it kept flooding out and away. It had happened so suddenly yet again, but perhaps I could direct it—perhaps I could change our fate?

Like I had when I first conjured this spell, I folded my hands together in front of me in prayer, all the while thinking: *I want the monsters and the swamp to disappear!*

The speed at which the magic expanded increased even more, and the golden mist covering the ground swept toward the salamander, the monsters surrounding the swamp, and even the swamp itself—until all had been swallowed. When the entirety of the swamp was blanketed in gold, the magic burst with new brilliance.

Golden sparkles rained down from the sky. The monsters and the swamp had vanished, leaving behind only the forest.

“Is it...over?” Albert whispered.

“It seems so.”

At Yuri's reply, the knights, who had been rooted to the spot, burst out in cheers of joy.

Act 6:

The Saint

IT WAS TEN MONTHS after my summoning, and some time had passed since our expedition into the western forest. After the way it ended, things got a bit crazy for me. How could they not, given that I had managed to display such indisputably Saintly abilities?

Judging by the results of the expedition, my mysterious magic was the legendary power of the Saint the stories had spoken of since antiquity. The magic had wiped out every last trace of the monsters and the weird swamp.

The second I cast the magic, I remembered the Saint's magic was supposed to be able to annihilate monsters, but I hadn't expected it to actually take out the swamp, too.

We still didn't know much about what that swamp really was.

On our way back to the palace, Yuri and I discussed several things, and of course the swamp came up as well. We surmised that because the monsters emerged from the swamp and the fact that my magic wiped it off the proverbial map, it was highly likely that the swamp was made from the miasma itself.

Yuri had never seen or heard of such a swamp before, and judging from Albert's reaction, neither had he. However, Albert was also of the opinion that the miasma made the swamp. Meanwhile, Yuri proposed that since such a sizable mass of miasma had disappeared, we had just witnessed the hallowed purification of the Saint's magic.

Right, so we also had to talk about the power of the Saint.

Words couldn't express just how excited Yuri was during this whole talk. He was like a different person, which freaked me out a little. But I got the feeling it was all because he had just seen a rare kind of magic rather than because I'd just been confirmed to be the Saint or anything.

In other words, he was acting like his normal hyper-focused nerd self. It

wasn't just him, either. Albert was similarly more interested in the event than the implication, which made me feel a bit optimistic. Maybe things could stay the same once we returned to the palace.

About a week after our return, that fantasy was crushed.

I was heading from the institute to the library to return a borrowed book when I noticed everyone was acting...different around me.

For example, whenever I encountered someone walking toward me from the opposite direction, they would move to the side and bow their head as if in reverence. The palace corridors were pretty wide, so they certainly didn't *need* to move out of the way. The only time you really needed to do that was when you turned a corner and almost ran into someone.

Admittedly, I frequently got lost in my thoughts and failed to pay attention to my surroundings, but I was pretty sure people hadn't done the bowing thing before.

Now that I had noticed it, I started keeping an eye out for other differences. They weren't so obvious, but I did notice some.

For example, when I went to return the book, usually only the librarian who was at the desk would receive me, but now all of the librarians filed out of the break room to greet me, like a guest of high station had arrived. Also, the rooms where I took my classes changed—they were now held in rooms that were noticeably more extravagant than before.

Furthermore, the official I talked to about my classes was the same person, but he seemed more nervous whenever he had to talk to me. It wasn't just that official's demeanor that changed, either—a ton of knights and mages seemed anxious around me now, too. Although, the knights from the Second Order who turned up every time I went to the library still acted the same as usual...but they had already seemed to worship me.

The people at the institute didn't act any different, either. Most of them weren't interested in anything but research. I wasn't sure if none of them had heard the rumors about the expedition, or if they had but didn't care because it had nothing to do with their work.

I hoped it was the latter. If it was the former, they might start treating me weirdly, too.

“What are you spacing out about?”

“Oh, Johan.” I had stopped making potions and was staring off into the empty distance as I reflected on the recent, perturbing changes to my life.

How could I even begin to respond? I hadn’t told Johan about my invocation of the Saint’s power during the expedition. When we came back, he was just happy I had escaped injury and didn’t ask for any details. Considering how everyone in the palace was acting, though, I had a feeling word had spread far and wide. There was no way he didn’t know.

“I was just thinking how things have been a bit odd, lately,” I confided.

“What do you mean?”

“Like, how everyone’s suddenly acting like I’m special. People get strangely stiff with me whenever I go to the palace.”

“Aha.” He clearly knew what I was getting at, as his expression changed from an idle smile to a wry one. “Well, it seems everyone in the palace can’t stop talking about the Saint’s awe-inspiring power.”

“And I’m guessing they can’t stop talking about who used that power, either?”

“That goes without saying.”

“I knew it.”

“I heard from Al. You accomplished quite a feat out there. It would be difficult *not* to talk about.”

I agreed, I supposed, but I still wished things could have stayed the same. Before, people had been for the most part polite with me, but there was a new *kind* of politeness that didn’t sit well.

“If it weren’t for you, I doubt anyone would’ve made it back alive,” Johan said.

“You really think so?”

“And that purification isn’t the only thing that’s caught their eye. The people

you healed during the battle prior are especially grateful to you.”

“That wasn’t special—I only did what I could. Plus, if they’d stayed hurt, I would have been in danger, too.”

“Sure, but—”

“To tell the truth, if they *are* so grateful to me, then they can show it by treating me like they used to. I don’t think I can get over all this new stuffiness.”

“I’m sure you will in time.”

“I don’t want to, though.”

My sulking only brought a strained smile to Johan’s face. After a moment, he said softly, “I’m sorry.”

I glanced at him to find he wore one of those unusually serious expressions of his.

Why is he apologizing? Because of how things turned out? But Johan wasn’t remotely responsible for anything that had happened. If anything, I was the one who could’ve said “no” when they asked me to go on the expedition.

That strained smile didn’t ease as he said, “I’m afraid I’m just as grateful as they are. So although I wish I could grant you your every desire...”

“Oh, Johan...”

“Unfortunately, your life is likely to grow more complicated from now on, and I fear we won’t be able to give you everything you hope for. I suspect it’s difficult to fully grasp, but to us, the Saint is a profoundly special person.”

I kind of got that, at least given what I’d gleaned from past conversations about the Saint. However, as my colleagues at the institute and the Knights of the Third Order all treated me like one of their own, I had never really *felt* the difference... Although, I did get a taste of the whole Saint-hood business when I started associating with the Second Order. In hindsight, their reverence was obvious, even if it had taken Johan spelling it out to really drive it home.

“When you say things will get complicated, do you mean I might have to leave the institute?” I asked.

“I have no intentions of encouraging you to do so, but I expect you won’t have as much time to spend here if you have to keep joining expeditions.”

“Well, that’s true. I was away for several days on the last one.”

“The western forest isn’t all that far away when you consider that next time you might be recruited to go all the way out to the countryside. That will take considerably more than a few days.”

“It’s that far?”

“Indeed. There’s a crisis brewing out there. Quite a large quantity of monsters has amassed, and the lords have frequently petitioned the king to send one of the Orders.”

“So the monsters don’t just manifest near the capital.”

“I’m afraid not. The crown is monitoring the situation, but if this last expedition has successfully quelled the number of monsters in our area, you’ll probably be heading out there next.”

The countryside. I heard it took about a week to travel to Salutania’s nearest neighbor. That was probably just as the crow flies, too. Depending on where the trouble was, it might take even longer to reach. And it wasn’t like the actual monster-slaying part would be over in a single day. We probably wouldn’t visit just one place, either.

“So... I guess going to the countryside means I’d be out of the capital for over a month, if not more.”

“Yes.”

“A whole month... And I guess I don’t know how frequently they’ll want me to join the expeditions, but that really will cut into my time here, won’t it?”

“I’m sure you’ll return to the capital to rest between ventures, but that might be the way of it until things have been sorted out in the countryside.”

It made sense, I supposed. I really didn’t like having no idea how long I would be away, though. Even worse, given this new responsibility, I couldn’t see myself remaining a researcher in the long-term. I’d feel bad staying on despite hardly ever being able to do any work. From an employment perspective, it

might make more sense for me to transfer to the Royal Magi Assembly, since expeditions were part of a mage's responsibilities.

But if I had to choose, I'd work here any day of the week—any month of the year. I love my work. I love my research.

My upset showed, and Johan asked with concern, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing... I was just thinking that, even though I want to stay here, I won't be able to do much work, so...I won't be pulling my weight, and..."

"You think you would be a drain on resources?"

"At the very least. Maybe I *should* transfer to the Royal Magi Assembly or something."

"But why? If you ask me, I think your research opportunities have expanded."

"Huh?"

"The countryside is crawling with herbs only found in particular territories—and there are unique potions brewed from each of them. I don't see any problem with keeping you on if we think of it as you heading out to pursue new inquiries."

"Are you sure?"

"I just said I didn't see a problem with it, didn't I? Don't worry." Johan smiled. I could just picture a halo around him!

If I wanted to keep working at the institute, then he would use his authority as head researcher to make it so, even if someone *did* try to move me elsewhere. *Thank you, Johan!*

But if it was so easy to keep me here, then what desire of mine did he think would be so difficult to grant?

"Ah, well," Johan trailed off when I asked.

I wished he would stop stalling and just tell me already.

"Didn't you say you wanted to live quietly like a regular person before?" he finally answered.

"Yes, very much so." I did remember saying something like that to him.

“I don’t believe that will be possible anymore.”

Unfortunately, I agreed. It was far too late to insist I could still live a normal life. “Well, there’s not much that can be done about it now. I already half-gave up,” I admitted.

“Just half?”

“Yes. Since, if possible, I would still like to live a *quiet* life,” I said with a self-conscious smile.

“I see. I’ll do everything I can to make that happen,” he poked me as he said that.

So he said, but was he really going to? I couldn’t tell from his tone if he was serious or joking, but I wanted to believe him.

“Let’s end today’s lesson here, then.”

“Thank you.”

My magic class with Yuri once more came to an end.

I continued my lessons after we returned from the expedition. After all, I couldn’t instantly pick up everything there was to learn about magic in this world. Despite my interest in it all, I had a very normal set of brains. *I bet if I were as smart as Yuri, I’d be able to remember everything the first time around.*

“Are you heading to the barracks of the Third Order now?” Yuri asked.

“That was the plan.”

“Would it be all right if I came along?”

“Do you have the time with all of your other work?”

“It can wait for a bit.”

There was something unsettling about the way Yuri smiled, but it was okay, right? I had a feeling Lord Smarty-Glasses would come to retrieve him before long anyway, like he had done a few times before when Yuri followed me to the Third Order’s barracks.

The first time, Yuri had become so absorbed in my *Heal* practice that he skipped out on some important meeting. Lord Smarty-Glasses and some other mages had turned the palace upside down looking for him.

I couldn't say for sure if that would happen again, but it was probably best to send a message to Lord Smarty-Glasses and let him know where Yuri was going. At the very least, it would be easier for him to wrangle his grand magus later.

"Shall we get going?" Yuri asked with a grin.

"Yes." I nodded, and we left the room.

I flagged down a mage who was passing by as we left and asked her to relay where Yuri and I were headed. The mage looked tired as she caught my drift and said, "I shall inform the magus at once."

I could only assume this mage had been part of the Grand Magus Search Party before.

Along the way, Yuri and I talked magic. However, we didn't discuss my current studies but rather the power of the Saint. There was just too much we didn't know about it. We had gone over the event and everything we knew several times since returning from the expedition.

We were in agreement that, based on the effects of the magic, it was indeed the power of the Saint. However, beyond that, we knew just about nothing—for example, how to cast it—which only made sense, since even I couldn't explain how I did it.

It might as well have been luck that I managed to invoke the power during the expedition; I had no idea what conditions summoned the golden wave of power I used to make the spell (or whatever it was) take effect. The light seemed to just flow out from inside of me, and from there all I did was...ask it to do things?

Try as I might to remember if I had done anything special to summon it, I couldn't come up with anything. Things had been so tense, and it all just happened at once.

As we went over it again that day, we noticed some kind of commotion up ahead as we passed through an open-air corridor that looked out onto the palace courtyard. *What's going on?*

I looked over at Yuri to find he wore a puzzled frown as well.

“I wonder what happened,” I said.

“I’m not sure, but let’s stop and take a look—it’s on our way, after all.”

The closer we got to the commotion, the more officials and maids we ran into.

Is everyone trying to figure out what’s going on?

This corridor was one of the palace’s main thoroughfares, so any business nearby inevitably garnered notice. People whispered amongst themselves as we were swept up in the river of movement, but I couldn’t tell what anyone was saying.

As we got closer, we realized we were headed toward an argument between a man and a woman. *A lovers’ quarrel, perhaps?*

This was sure to be a point of gossip for the maids later. Since they didn’t have forms of entertainment such as TV or magazines, people working in the palace often adored gossip, and a fight between lovers was their favorite topic.

“You’re so insistent!”

“But, Your Highness—”

As we slipped through the growing crowd of people, the woman’s voice sounded familiar to me. I quickened my pace until I could finally see just who was arguing.

Oof, I knew it. The woman was Liz.

“Continuing as you have will only be detrimental to her. Do reconsider,” she pleaded.

“Don’t tell me you’re serious about your offer to help.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“I heard you’re the one who’s been telling everyone to isolate Aira.”

“Whatever are you referring to?”

But the topic of the argument was somehow disquieting.

Despite how many people had gathered, they kept a fixed distance from the two at the center of the disruption. I got it, don't get me wrong; the person Liz was arguing with was none other than Kyle, the red-haired crown prince. No one dared intercede in an argument between two people of such high status, even if they were worried sick.

At that point, I realized Liz and the prince weren't alone. With them were a number of boys standing behind the prince—presumably the entourage of followers I had heard about before. I recognized a few of them from my summoning.

And next to the prince was the girl from my world, on whom I hadn't laid eyes for nearly a year: Aira. I was relieved to see she didn't look worse for wear. *It looks like they've been feeding her properly. Thank goodness for that.*

From the cute pink dress she wore, I could tell she was being well taken care of. However, her expression was full of anxiety as her eyes darted between the prince and Liz.

The argument continued, but I was focused on Aira. I could already guess what this was about. Prince Kyle thought Liz was the cause of everything the other noble girls had done to Aira, things Liz had told me about before.

It had started off as excluding Aira or scolding her, but on top of all that, the ladies had begun destroying her important possessions, such as her textbooks.

However, I was pretty sure Liz had actually tried to put an end to all that. That was why I was certain it wasn't just the ladies who needed to change their behavior—something needed to be done about the guy most directly involved with Aira's situation, too. Liz had told me all about how frustrated she was that the prince kept getting in her way so she couldn't actually talk to Aira.

"You were jealous..." Prince Kyle trailed off.

"Jealous, you say?" Liz asked.

"Of course. You're my fiancée, after all. You don't like how I'm with Aira all the time."

"Ah. If you believe this is a matter of concern, why do you not agree to my proposal? This goes for you lot as well." Liz directed her fiery gaze at the

prince's entourage. "Of course, you understand it is considered ungentlemanly for a man who is already engaged to devote the majority of his time to a woman other than his betrothed."

"Be that as it may, as the one who supervised the Saint Summoning Ritual, I am responsible for Aira. As the one who summoned her without warning, I must protect her from harm. This is nothing to feel guilty about."

Liz paused for a moment. "Aira was not the only one you summoned, though, don't you remember? Yet you have not done a single thing for the other woman."

"Other woman? Oh, you mean the one everyone's been talking about? There's no way *she* could be the Saint."

"*What* did you just say?"

"People know the ritual was a success, and they want to see results. But Aira still needs to get used to going on expeditions. However, the people are clamoring, so in order to appease them, the officials attributed the knights' recent achievements to the fake Saint to make it look like we were moving forward, right?"

"Your Highness, do you *understand* what you just said?"

Uh oh, Liz just snapped. Even the guys standing behind the prince looked startled at Liz's newly alarming aura.

Thank you for getting mad on my behalf, Liz. Even I want to beat him up a bit right now. I mean, I don't really care if people call me a fake, since I wanted to stay an ordinary person anyway. But this is the future king they're listening to here, and he's calling the Saint's accomplishments propaganda? And in front of so many people? If it were true, he would've ruined all those efforts. And even though it isn't, who knows—maybe tomorrow everyone in the palace will be talking about how the Saint was actually a fake.

Dazed by the prince's abject ridiculousness, I suddenly made eye contact with Aira. Her eyes widened in surprise.

What's with her? Oh, now Liz noticed me, too. Aaand so has the prince. Though I'm not even sure he knows who I am.

“Sei,” Liz said, bringing everyone’s attention to me.

“Uhhh, hello?” I responded.

I didn’t think I was imagining how pale the officials who had been watching suddenly turned. Of course they were freaking out. The prince of their country just called me a fake, basically right to my face.

People started to scuttle off, perhaps in search of someone important. Frankly, I really hoped they’d find someone who could bring this situation under control.

“Who are you?” Prince Kyle asked.

I met his eyes and resisted rolling my own.

Seriously? You don’t remember me? I knew it’d get bad if I didn’t respond, but I really didn’t feel like dignifying him with an answer. Unfortunately, it would have been immature to ignore him, so I reluctantly gave my name with a proper bow, just like I had practiced in class. “My name is Sei.”

I performed the bare minimum, anyway.

The prince finally seemed to recognize the color of my hair. “You’re the Saint everyone’s been talking about?”

Now I ignored him and turned to Liz. I could tell he was offended, but I kept at it. Surely I could get away with that much. “Say, Liz, if you two are going to argue, wouldn’t it be better to do so in another room? You guys are making quite the scene.”

Liz gave a too-bright, brittle smile in response. Most likely, she had suggested the same thing to the prince only to be ignored.

I didn’t know exactly how this argument had started, but the prince had really lost his cool. If he had kept his composure, he might have realized the harm he caused himself by having what amounted to a royal tantrum in the middle of the palace courtyard—even some of his followers had to be cringing.

Or wait, was that Liz’s intention the whole time?

At that moment, Prince Kyle grew impatient and reached out toward my shoulder with a, “Hey!”

Let me think. Based on what I've learned in class, isn't it a breach of etiquette for a man to casually touch an unmarried woman? Does he think that because he's a prince, he's exempt?

I considered brushing him off, but his hand never reached me—because Albert had suddenly arrived and blocked him.

“Knight Commander Hawke!” Prince Kyle yelped at Albert for grabbing him, but Albert, unmoved, merely dropped the prince’s hand.

I *did* notice that Albert was a bit out of breath, which meant he had rushed over here.

The prince glared at Albert in annoyance. But before he could act, another person arrived.

“What’s all this ruckus about?”

“Father!”

It was His Majesty, the King, and behind him came the prime minister. The officials had run off to summon none other than the two people guaranteed to command this situation.

“These people—” the prince began, but the king interrupted him.

“I am aware of what’s happened. You and your idiocy have caused a scene, and in front of such a crowd, no less.”

“But, Father!”

“To top it all off, you’ve been terribly rude to the Saint.”

“I was no such thing. *They* are the ones who—”

“Oh? But didn’t you just accuse the Saint of being an impostor?”

“Is it not true that she’s an imposter—one you prepared yourself?”

The king was silent for a moment before responding, perfectly measured.
“Now why would you think that?”

“Aira was the only one truly summoned during the ritual.”

“But Lady Sei here was also summoned.”

“Huh?”

“I suppose I could have forgiven such an oversight if it were temporary. But didn’t you hear all the reports that two women had been summoned?”

“Well... But...”

“Moreover, according to the results of Grand Magus Drewes’ Appraisals, Lady Sei is unmistakably the Saint.”

Huh? Really? I looked at Yuri reflexively, but all he did was bow in the direction of the king. He didn’t even glance my way. *Maybe that’s just what he concluded after what I did during the expedition?*

The king continued. “And this is not only a matter of the grand magus’s assessment. Knight Commander Hawke reported Sei brilliantly fulfilled her Saintly duty on the most recent expedition. Of course, similar reports were filed by the Knights of the Second Order as well.”

The prince went silent.

“I understand you feel responsible for the outcome of the ritual and wish to keep Lady Aira safe,” said the king. “But in that case, do you not see how you’ve failed to do the same for Lady Sei? Worse, you’ve treated her as an impostor. After all she’s achieved, everyone has acknowledged Lady Sei as the Saint. But what has Lady Aira done? She has yet to accomplish a single thing.”

“I...”

“Even putting these events aside, you have no true basis for your accusation. On that note, I believe we should continue this conversation elsewhere.”

The prince remained silent.

The king looked at his son in disappointment for but a moment before his expression went back to normal. He ordered the knights waiting for his command to escort the prince and his followers elsewhere. The deflated prince and his entourage quietly followed.

At that, the audience began to return to their duties.

“I would like to hear more about this from you as well, Lady Ashley. Would you mind accompanying us?” the king said to Liz.

“As you wish, Your Majesty.”

“As for you, Lady Sei, I shall speak with you later.”

“Y-yes, Your Majesty.” It seemed like I was allowed to go.

The king gave me a surreptitious but apologetic nod before going in the direction of his son. Liz and the prime minister followed after him.

It was all over before I was able to really grasp what had happened, but...it seemed like the school problems Liz had told me about would finally be resolved?

At least, as I left with Albert and Yuri, I hoped they would.

We walked the palace halls with Mary in the lead. Two other maids and two knights accompanied us. Since I was clad in the same white robe I had worn during my official audience with the king, everyone bowed as they cleared the way.

What the heck is going on? People’s attitude toward me had only grown more respectful. Everyone who worked in the palace now acknowledged me as the Saint, so I guess it couldn’t be helped. Although I had given up trying to fight it, I still wasn’t used to being treated like this yet.

I suppressed a sigh and kept walking down the hall in silence. We were headed to a certain room in the palace.

When we arrived, Mary knocked on the door. Someone responded, and the door opened from within. Mary stepped aside so I could enter.

Inside the room, I found two girls waiting. One gave an elegant bow while the other girl’s curtsy was somewhat tense.

The door closed. The knights were waiting outside, so the only ones with me now were the two girls and the three maids who had accompanied me. A girls-only tea party had been prepared.

“Hello, Sei.”

“Hello, Liz. And...” I glanced at the girl who stood next to Liz. She looked

awfully nervous with the way she tightened her lips into a flat line. “I suppose it would be best to start with introductions.”

Aira smiled stiffly. “I’m Aira Misono. It’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too. I’m Sei Takanashi.” Her nervousness was getting to me. My smile probably looked forced, too. At least that was over with, but it would be awkward if we all just kept staring at each other. “How about we sit down, then?”

“What a lovely idea,” Liz agreed.

We headed over to the round table that had been so well prepared. After we sat, Mary gracefully poured us cups of steaming tea and placed them before us. I took a sip and glanced at Liz and Aira again.

We were here together today to strengthen our friendship with Aira.

After the scene he caused, Crown Prince Kyle had been relieved of all matters concerning the Saint. He had taken responsibility for all that had happened and was temporarily being confined to the palace. He was due to graduate from the academy within the next few months, so his house arrest would most likely be lifted right before the graduation ceremony.

Also, Second Prince Rayne was to take over as the individual responsible for monitoring Aira’s well-being.

I found out about all of this from the king himself, but only after he had made all of these decisions. He wanted me to know since the dispute had involved me, too.

Prince Kyle’s followers were also put under house arrest until the graduation ceremony. Luckily, they were all talented students, so not going to school until the ceremony wasn’t impacting their ability to graduate.

The only person who escaped punishment was Aira. The public reason was that she hadn’t been directly involved in the dispute. While the way she had let herself be put on a pedestal and simply followed the directions of everyone around her was problematic, you had to factor in something rather important. In brief, Aira had been summoned from Japan just like I had, and back in Japan, she was still young enough to require the protection of adults. You couldn’t

blame her for relying on Prince Kyle and his entourage after her sudden summoning. In any case, after some political discussions, it was decided that Aira wouldn't be punished.

However, everyone Aira knew was now under house arrest. According to Liz, up until now, no one but Kyle and his entourage had been able to get close to Aira, so she didn't really know anyone else. It would be irresponsible to leave her alone, so Liz had decided to be by her side from now on.

While Prince Rayne was ultimately responsible for Aira, after what happened with Prince Kyle, it was probably best to provide Aira with the company of another girl. So now, finally, Aira had a friend—one to whom no one could object.

Liz also took care to clear up all of the misunderstandings surrounding Aira, and they finally had a peaceful life at the academy. We were holding this tea party now that everything had settled down.

According to Liz, Aira had asked to meet me herself. Aira was interested in me since we were from the same hometown, in a manner of speaking, and ever since she learned I existed, she had been dying to talk to me. Apparently, she wanted to know everything about the past year or so of my life.

In other words, we had a *ton* to discuss today.

"I hear things are a lot more relaxed at the academy, too," I said.

"Yes, finally," Liz said.

"And I heard it's all thanks to you, Liz. Good job handling all of that."

"Thank you." Liz smiled bashfully.

It seemed Liz had a heck of a time trying to get everyone on the same page at school. Some girls still held a grudge against Aira, but thanks to Liz's efforts, most of them were now on good terms with her.

As the fiancée of the crown prince and the daughter of a marquis, no one was able to openly defy Liz's request. Even in the academy, classism had its say. But Liz didn't force anyone to do anything, and I knew she was a skillful mediator.

"How about things for you, Aira?" I asked.

“It’s going great for me now, thanks to Liz,” she said with a smile.

She had a whole bunch of friends now, all of them girls, and was delighted to be able to relax and chat about girly things like she used to back home in Japan. She was especially pleased to talk about fashion, which led to us derailing our whole life-update thing as we discussed the latest trends in the capital.

Aira apologized for going off-topic, but I didn’t mind. The way she gushed so excitedly was seriously adorable. Heck, even the way she apologized was cute.

Seeing her and Liz smiling like this soothed my soul. Happy, beautiful young women just have that effect on people.

“How about you, Sei?” Liz asked.

“Well, I guess you could say things have settled down for me a bit, too.”

“I hear you’ve been officially canonized as the Saint now.”

“Don’t remind me.” I sighed, wearing a gloomy face, which made Liz chuckle.

It was true, though. Things had actually settled down now that everyone treated me as the Saint. I had resigned myself to the recognition due in part to what I had done, but I was a bit tired of being treated like a VIP. I was just a commoner, after all. Did they really think I could endure having every single person I passed bow to me? No way!

Liz understood, thankfully. However, it was because she got it that she teased me.

Aira understood how I felt as well. While listening to my woes, she gave me a sympathetic nod. She had been subject to the VIP experience in the palace while she was stuck with Prince Kyle, after all. I could only assume that as a fellow Japanese person, she had felt the same discomfort.

“But I hear things are going to get busy for me soon,” I said.

“Really?” Liz asked.

“I might have to head out to the countryside for a little while.”

“I see.”

While there were fewer monsters around the capital thanks to the expedition

in the western forest, the countryside was locked in a state of turmoil. The officials had received numerous requests for a dispatch of the Knightly Orders.

The crown was currently investigating the swamp we had seen, but everyone suspected that the glut of monsters in the countryside meant more swamp-type things were out there, too. Therefore, you-know-who had to go, as it was my sole responsibility to purify them.

Liz seemed to be mulling this over, as she didn't try to expand on the topic. Instead, her look changed to one of apologetic worry.

Oh, please don't look at me like that! It's not your fault.

"Are you going to have to quit working at the institute, then?" Liz asked. She seemed particularly concerned about this. I think she understood just how much I liked working there.

"It seems I don't have to. The head researcher said he'd ensure I can stay."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Liz smiled delightedly again.

"Yeah. I'll have to do something to pay him back."

As Liz and I laughed, Aira piped up with a soft, "Um..."

We both gave her a questioning look.

Aira bit her lip. "Have you been working at the palace since you got here?"

"Yes, that's right. I'm a researcher at a place called the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora."

"Can you tell me a bit about it?"

"I don't mind, but..."

When I asked Aira why she wanted to know, she confessed she wanted to figure out what she might do in the future. Up until now, she had been under Prince Kyle's protection and lived as the Saint in the palace, doing whatever she was told. However, since separating, she had started wondering what her life might become.

It wasn't that anyone was forcing her to change her life, but she was racked with an intangible uneasiness about whether she herself wanted to remain

where she was. She knew why she felt this way: during that dispute in the courtyard, the king had said clearly and in no uncertain terms that Aira had yet to achieve anything. Therefore, the thought of what she would do after she graduated from the academy tormented her.

“Isn’t there anything you’d *like* to do?” I asked Aira.

“Well, I suppose if it were possible, I would keep studying magic.”

“Magic? In that case, maybe you should join the Royal Magi Assembly.”

“I think that’s a good idea, too,” Liz agreed.

Of course, Aira would have to pass a test in order to become a mage, but I doubted that would be much of an obstacle based on her current abilities. Plus, I had heard Aira was magically gifted.

Normally, it was sufficient to be proficient in a single type of elemental magic, but Aira actually had an affinity with three types. Liz told me excitedly that only one person in a hundred years had ever possessed such talent.

However, Prince Kyle had only concentrated on Aira’s Holy Magic level, so her other affinities were lagging. Given all this, Aira hoped to deepen her understanding of magic all around.

“If you have natural talent, that’s even more reason to join the Royal Magi Assembly,” I said enthusiastically. “The mages are experts, so I’m sure they’d have a ton to teach you. I’ve been taking classes with their grand magus myself.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I think it’s a great idea to home in on that skill. Plus, as a mage, you’ll be asked to join the expeditions, so I’m sure you’ll be able to achieve something worthy of recognition in no time.”

After hearing that, Aira seemed quite interested in joining their ranks, though I’m sure Liz’s eager recommendation had something to do with it, too. Not to mention, her eyes seemed to sparkle when she mentioned we might be able to see each other more often, seeing as I had to go to the Royal Magi Assembly’s barracks for my lessons.

I guess it must be reassuring to be able to spend time with someone from your own world.

After hearing what Liz had to say, Aira decided to join the Royal Magi Assembly after she graduated from the academy. When she came to that conclusion, her expression entirely transformed from how it had been at the start of our discussion—it was now a brilliant smile.



Afterword

HELLO, my name is Yuka Tachibana.

Thanks to the support of all of my readers, *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent* has reached Volume 2. Thank you so much.

This time, I would like to talk about the Behind the Scenes chapters for this volume. There will probably be some spoilers, so be sure to read the whole novel before you read any further.

Due to Volume 1 ending on a bit of a cliffhanger, lots of people clamored for the next volume to come out soon, but it wound up being published a bit late. I apologize for that. Things were even crazier this time, and I despaired a little over how poorly I managed my schedule.

I must have asked Editor W at Kadokawa Books to change the schedule a hundred times. I am indebted to him yet again. So, thank you. I caused a ton of trouble for other people, too. I would like to take the opportunity to both thank and apologize to them.

I mentioned how Volume 1 ended on a cliffhanger, but I somewhat modified the plot I had first come up with when I first started serializing this story.

I had intended to continue the plot in Act 5 straight into Volume 2. However, as a result, the climax of Volume 2 would have wound up landing in the middle of the book. Therefore, I took some ideas from the comments I received when I posted the story on *Let's Be Novelists* and the additions to Act 4 became the focus of Volume 2. I was worried it might be a bit redundant, but what did you think?

“Act 1: The Appraisal” and the Behind the Scenes that came right after were both born from everyone’s comments. Then there’s the new character, the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly. He was unexpectedly a good plot device, or perhaps it would be more apt to say that he helped drive the plot on his own, so I think he was probably the new character who appeared most often in Volume 2. I expect he’ll probably appear a lot in Volume 3 and

beyond...

“Act 2: Special Training” was derived from Act 1. I came up with this chapter after thinking I needed to add something related to Act 5 when contemplating the composition of the story as a whole. The aforementioned grand magus really helped make this one work. I came up with ideas one after the other thanks to him. I have a feeling that the other theme of this act was showing off his obsession with his research and how he’s the kind of person who charges in without thinking.

“Act 3: Lady” was added when developing the composition of the story as a whole. When I drew out the new plot for Volume 2, I had meant to make it romantic, but I realized it was lacking in that department and came up with this chapter. The dance part in particular wasn’t really related to the main plot of the story, so part of me worries that some people might find this chapter meandering. I apologize, since there really were some people of that opinion.

“Act 4: Herb Enhancement” was also added when I was trying to support the greater story. By adding this chapter, I explored the descriptions of the Saint’s powers. The plot I thought of was rather loose, so I kept adding these sorts of scenes along the way. Later, it seemed to get out of hand, so I did feel a bit nervous about it.

“Act 5: Expedition” was part of the original plot, and it’s the first battle scene. This is supposed to be a romance story, so it felt a bit strange having a fight scene in here, but it was necessary for the story. I worry that it might have gone too smoothly.

Finally, “Act 6: The Saint” was also part of the original plot. Sei is finally recognized as the Saint, and the crown prince gets condemned. At first, I had considered making this condemnation be like in the genre of villainess stories that were popular at the time, where the crown prince would be stripped of his title and exiled with Aira. There were a lot of people eagerly looking forward to just that, but after publishing the Behind the Scenes story after Act 4 on *Let’s Be Novelists*, there were a flood of comments hoping Aira could be saved, so as a result, I made this chapter much milder than I was originally planning for it to be. Prince Kyle’s future may be uncertain, but Aira’s looks like it will be bright.

To tell the truth, I had only thought of the story up until this plot point when I first started publishing it. I had intended for Sei and Knight Commander Albert's relationship to have reached the point where they were very close, but how did things turn out like this...? Therefore, I plan to keep writing, so I hope you will continue to keep reading.

Shuri Yasuyuki did the artwork for both this volume and the first one. Thank you again for such beautiful illustrations. The design for Yuri Drewes was exactly as I had imagined it in my head, so much so that I did a triumphant pose when I first saw it. Just as I expected!

Lastly, thank you so much for reading up until this point. I hope we meet again in the near future.



Thank you for reading!

Get the latest news about your favorite Seven Seas books and brand-new licenses delivered to your inbox every week:

[Sign up for our newsletter!](#)

Or visit us online:

gomanga.com/newsletter